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THE IVORY GATE

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF 'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

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CONTENTS

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CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIV. CAN HE REMEMBER ?	1
XXV. WILL HE REMEMBER ?	21
XXVI. THE LESSON OF THE STREET	39
XXVII. 'I KNOW THE MAN'	80
XXVIII. ATHELSTAN'S DISCOVERY	100
XXIX. CHECKLEY SEES A GHOST	121
XXX. THE DAY AFTER THE GHOST	140
XXXI. THE THREE ACCOMPLICES	161
XXXII. ELSIE AND HER MOTHER	187
XXXIII. PLENARY CONFESSION	199
XXXIV. LE CONSEIL DE FAMILLE	244
XXXV. THE LAST.	285

THE IVORY GATE

CHAPTER XXIV

CAN HE REMEMBER?

It was past ten o'clock that Sunday evening when Elsie arrived home. Athelstan and George were waiting up for her. 'Again the mysterious appointment?' asked the former. 'Are we to know anything yet?'—Elsie shook her head.—'Not to-night? Very good. You look tired, Elsie.'

'I am tired, thank you. And—and I think I would rather not talk to-night. I will go to my own room.—Have patience, both of you, for a day or two longer. Believe me, everything is going well. The only reason

why I cannot tell you what I have been doing is that it is so strange—so wonderful—that I have not been able even to shape it into words in my own mind.—What is to-day? The 1st of August.'

'Only eleven days yet—eleven long days,' said George, 'but also eleven short days.'

'I do not forget. Well—you may both of you sit down—go about your business—you need do nothing more. As for me, I think you will have to get on without me every evening this week. But be quite easy. The thing is done.' And with that, nodding and laughing, she ran out of the room.

'It is done,' repeated George. 'The thing is done. Which thing?'

'It is done,' repeated Athelstan. 'What is done? How was it done? Who did it? When was it done?'

'Since Elsie says it is done, I am bound to accept her assurance. Presumably, she has caught old Checkley at South Square, in the

very act. Never mind ; I am quite sure that Elsie knows what she says.'

In her own retreat Elsie sat down to consider.

If you think of it, she had a good deal to consider. She had, in fact, a tremendous weapon, an eighty-ton Woolwich, in her possession ; a thing which had to be handled so that when it was fired it should not produce a general massacre. All those who had maligned and spoken and thought evil of her brother and her lover should, she thought, be laid prostrate by the mere puff and whiff of the discharge. Checkley should fall backwards, and raise a bump at the back of his head as big as an egg. Sir Samuel and Hilda should be tumbled down in the most ignominious fashion, just as if they had no money at all. And her mother should be forced to cry out that she had been wrong and hasty.

She held in her own hands nothing less than the complete demolition of all this erection of suspicion and malignity. Nothing

less. She could restore to her brother that which he had never lost, save in the eyes of his own people, who should have been the most jealous to preserve it. No greater service could be rendered to him. And she could clear from her lover's name whatever shreds and mists had been gathered round it by the industrious breath of Checkley—that humble Cloud Compeller. You see, we all have this much of Zeus in us, even in the compelling of Clouds: every man by the exercise of a little malignity, a little insinuation and a few falsehoods, can raise quite a considerable mist about the head or the name or the figure or the reputation of anyone. Women—some women, that is—are constantly engaged in this occupation; and after they have been at their work, it is sometimes hard for the brightest sunshine to melt those mists away.

To be able to clear away clouds is a great thing. Besides this, Elsie had found out what the rest had failed to find out—and by the

simplest method. She had learned from the only person who knew at what hour she should be most likely to find the mysterious Edmund Gray, and she had then waited on the stairs until he came. No method more direct—yet nobody thought of it except herself. She had done it. As the result, there was no longer any mystery. The man who forged the first cheque: the man who wrote those letters and conducted their transfer: was, as they all thought at first, Edmund Gray. No other. And Edmund Gray was Edward Dering, one and the same person—and Edward Dering was a Madman, and this discovery it was which so profoundly impressed her. There were no confederates: there was no one wanted to intercept the post: no one had tampered with the safe: the Chief himself had received the letters and conducted the correspondence alternately as Edmund Gray himself, or Edmund Gray acting unconsciously for Edward Dering.

Perfectly impossible—Perfectly simple—

Perfectly intelligible. As for the impossibility, a fact may remain when its impossibility is established. Elsie was not a psychologist or a student of the brain. She knew nothing about mental maladies. She only said after what she had seen and heard: 'The man is mad.'

Then she thought how she should best act. To establish the identity of Mr. Dering and Edmund Gray must be done. It was the one thing necessary. Very well. That could easily be done, and in a simple way. She had only to march into his office at the head of a small band of witnesses and say: 'You wanted us to find out Edmund Gray! I have found him. And thou art the man!'

He would deny it. He certainly knew nothing about it. Then she would call upon her witnesses. First, Athelstan's commissionaire, who declared that he should remember, even after eight years or eighty years, the gentleman who sent him to cash that cheque. 'Who is this man, commisionnaire?'

‘That is Mr. Edmund Gray.’

Next the landlord of his chambers. ‘Who is this man?’

‘That is Mr. Edmund Gray, my tenant for nine years.’

Then she would call the eminent Barrister, Mr. Langhorne. ‘Do you know this man?’

‘He is my neighbour, Mr. Edmund Gray.’
And Freddy Carstone the Coach.

‘He is my neighbour, Mr. Edmund Gray.’

And the laundress, and she would say: ‘I have done for the gentleman for nine years. He’s a very good gentleman, and generous—and his name is Mr. Edmund Gray.’

And the people from the Hall—and they would make answer, with one consent: ‘That is Mr. Edmund Gray, our preacher and our teacher.’

And she herself would give her testimony: ‘I have sat with you in your Chambers. I have heard you lecture in your Hall, surrounded by these good people, and you are Edmund Gray.’

The thing was quite easy to do. She could bring forward all this evidence at once, and it would be unanswerable and convincing even to Sir Samuel.

Except for one thing which made it difficult.

The discovery would be a most dreadful—a most terrible—revelation to one who believed himself to be the most respectable solicitor in the whole of London; the most trustworthy; the clearest in mind; the keenest in vision; the coldest in judgment. He would learn without the least previous suspicion or preparation, or any softening of the blow, that for many years he had been—— What? Is there any other word—any kinder word—any word less terrifying or less humiliating by which the news could be conveyed to him that he had been Mad—Mad—Mad? Heavens! what a word it is! How terrible to look at with its three little letters which mean so much! All the words that mean much are monosyllables; God — Love — Joy — Hate—

Fear—Glad—Sad—Mad—Bad—Hell—Home—Wife—Child—House—Song—Feast—Wine—Kiss—everything—they are the oldest words, you see; they have been used from time immemorial by prehistoric man as well as by ourselves.

Mr. Dering had to be told that he was Mad. Somehow or other, he must be told that. It seemed at first the only way out of the difficulty. How could this girl communicate the dreadful news to her guardian, who had always been to her considerate, and even affectionate? She shrank from the task. Then she thought she would hand it over to her brother Athelstan. But he was far more concerned about clearing up the hateful business than about softening the blow for Mr. Dering. Or of communicating it to George. What should she do? Mr. Dering was mad. Not mad all the time, but mad now and then, sometimes every day, sometimes with intervals. This kind of madness, I believe, takes many forms—a fact which

should make the strongest men tremble. Sometimes it lasts a long time before it is found out. Sometimes even it is never found out at all. Solicitors and doctors tell queer stories about it. For instance, that story—quite a common story—of an old gentleman of irreproachable reputation, a speaker and leader in religious circles, a man enormously respected by all classes, concerning whom not his bitterest enemy had a word of scandal—yet, after his death, things deplorable, things incredible, things to be suppressed at any cost, were brought to the knowledge of his lawyers. At certain times he went mad, you see. Then he forgot who he was: he forgot his reputation, his place in the world, and the awful penalties of being found out: he went down: he lived among people of the baser sort, and became an inferior man with another name, and died without ever knowing his own dreadful record. Another of whom I have heard was mad for fifteen years, yet the Chief of a great House, who all the time conducted

the business with great ability. He was found out at last because he began to buy things. Once he sent home six grand pianos : another time he bought all the cricket bats that were in stock in a certain shop ; and another time he bought all the hats that fitted him at all the hatters' shops within a circle whose centre was Piccadilly Circus and the radius a mile long. After this they gave him a cheerful companion, who took walks abroad with him, and he retired from active business.

Some philosophers maintain that we are all gone mad on certain points. In that case, if one does not know it or suspect it, and if our friends neither know nor suspect it, what does it matter ? There are also, we all know, points on which some of us are mad, and everybody knows it. There is the man who believes that he is a great poet, and publishes volume after volume all at his own expense to prove it : there is the man—but he ought to be taken away and put on a treadmill—who writes letters to the papers

on every conceivable subject with the day before yesterday's wisdom: there is the man who thinks he can paint—we all know plenty of men mad like unto these, and we are for the most part willing to tolerate them. Considerations, however, on the universality of the complaint fail to bring consolation to any except those who have it not. In the same way, nobody who dies of any disease is comforted with the thought of the rarity or the frequency of that disease; its interesting character has no charm for him. Nor is the man on his way to be hanged consoled by the reminder that thousands have trodden that flowery way before him. To Mr. Dering, proud of his own intellect, self-sufficient and strong, the discovery of these things would certainly bring humiliation intolerable, perhaps—even—shame unto Death itself. How—oh! how could things be managed so as to spare him this pain?

Elsie's difficulties grew greater the more she pondered over them. It was past mid-

night when she closed the volume of thought and her eyes at the same moment.

In the morning, Athelstan kissed her gravely.

‘Do you remember what you said last night, Elsie? You said that we could rest at peace because the thing was done.’

‘Well, Athelstan, the words could only have one meaning, could they? I mean, if you want me to be more explicit, that the thing is actually done. My dear brother, I know all about it now. I know who signed that first cheque—who sent the commissionaire to the Bank—who received the notes—who placed them in the safe—who wrote about the transfers—who received the letters and carried on the whole business. I can place my hand upon him to-day, if necessary.’

‘Without doubt? With proofs, ample proofs?’

‘Without the least doubt—with a cloud of witnesses. My dear brother, do not doubt me. I have done it. Yet—for a reason—to

spare one most deeply concerned—for the pity of it—if you knew—give me a few days—a week, perhaps, to find a way if I can. If I cannot, then the cruel truth must be told bluntly, whatever happens.’

‘Remember all the mischief the old villain has done.’

‘The old villain? Oh! you mean Checkley?’

‘Of course; whom should I mean?’

‘Nobody—nothing. Brother, if you bid me speak to-day, I will speak. No one has a better right to command. But if this—this person—were to die to-day, my proofs are so ample that there could be no doubt possible. Yes—even my mother—it is dreadful to say it—but she is so hard and so obstinate—even my mother would acknowledge that there is no doubt possible.’

Athelstan stooped and kissed her. ‘Order it exactly as you please, my child. If I have waited eight long years, I can wait another week. Another week. Then I shall at last

be able to speak of my people at home. I shall go back to California with belongings like other men. I shall be able to make friends; I can even, if it comes in my way, make love, Elsie. Do you think you understand quite what this means to me?’

He left her presently to go about his work.

In the corner of the room stood her easel with the portrait, the fancy portrait, of Mr. Dering the Benevolent—Mr. Dering the Optimist—Mr. Dering as he might be with the same features and the least little change in their habitual setting.

Elsie stood before this picture, looking at it curiously.

‘Yes,’ she murmured, ‘you are a dear, tender-hearted, kindly, benevolent, simple old Thing. You believe in human nature: you think that everybody is longing for the Kingdom of Heaven. You think that everybody would be comfortable in it: that everybody longs for honesty. Before I altered you and

improved your face, you were Justice without mercy : you were Law without leniency : you were Experience which knows that all men are wicked by choice when they get the chance : you had no soft place anywhere : you held that Society exists only for the preservation of Property. Oh ! you are so much more lovable now, if you would only think so—if you only knew. You believe in men and women : that is a wonderful advance—and you have done well to change your old name to your new name. I think I should like you always to be Edmund Gray. But how am I to tell you ? How, in the name of wonder, am I to tell you that you are Edmund Gray ? First of all, I must see you—I must break the thing gently—I must force you somehow to recollect, as soon as possible. I must make you somehow understand what has happened.'

She had promised to meet Mr. Edmund Gray at his Chambers that evening at five. He showed his confidence in her by giving her

a latchkey, so that she might let herself in if he happened not to be in the Chambers when she called, at five. She would try, then, to bring him back to himself. She pictured his amazement—his shame—at finding himself in strange rooms under another name, preaching wild doctrines. It would be too much for him. Better go to Mr. Dering, the real Mr. Dering, and try to move him, in his own office, to recollect what had happened. Because, you see, Elsie, unacquainted with these obscure forms of brain disease, imagined that she might by artful question and suggestion clear that clouded memory, and show the lawyer his double figuring as a Socialist.

She waited till the afternoon. She arrived at New Square about three, two hours before her engagement at Gray's Inn.

Mr. Dering received her with his usual kindness. He was austere but benignant.

‘I tried to see you last night,’ she said, untruthfully, because the words conveyed the impression that she had called upon him.

‘No—no. I was—I suppose I was out. I went out’—— His face clouded, and he stopped.

‘Yes—you were saying, Mr. Dering, that you went out.’

‘Last night was Sunday, wasn’t it? Yes; I went out.—Where did I go?’ He drummed the table with his fingers irritably. ‘Where did I go? Where?—What does it matter?’

‘Nothing at all. Only it is strange that you should not remember.’

‘I told you once before, Elsie,’ he said, ‘I suffer—I labour—under curious fits of forgetfulness. Now, at this moment, I—it really is absurd—I cannot remember where I was last night. I am an old man. It is the privilege of age to forget yesterday, and to remember fifty years ago.’

‘I was talking last night to an old gentleman who said much the same. He has Chambers where he goes to write: he has a Lecture Hall—where he preaches to the people’——

Mr. Dering looked at her in mild surprise. What did she mean? Elsie coloured.

‘Of course,’ she said, ‘this has nothing to do with you.’

‘How I spent the evening I know very well,’ Mr. Dering went on. ‘Yet I forget. That is the trouble with me. My housekeeper will not give me dinner on Sunday evening, and on that day I go to my Club. I get there about five or six: I read the magazines till seven. Sometimes I drop off to sleep—we old fellows will drop off, you know—about seven I have dinner. After dinner I take my coffee, and read or talk if there is any one I know. About nine I walk home. That has been my custom for many years. Therefore, that is how I spent the evening of yesterday.—But, you see, I cannot remember it. Breakfast I remember, and the Church service afterwards. Luncheon I remember: getting home at ten I remember. But the interval between I cannot remember.’

‘Do you forget other things? Do you remember Saturday afternoon, for instance?’

‘Yes—perfectly. I left the office about five. I walked straight home.—No—no—that isn’t right. It was nearly eight when I got home. I remember. The dinner was spoiled.—No—I did not go straight home.’

‘Perhaps you stayed here till past seven?’

‘No—no. I remember looking at the clock as I put on my hat. It was half-past five when I went out—Five. What did I do between half-past five o’clock and eight? I forget. You see, my trouble, Elsie—I forget. Perhaps I went to the Club: perhaps I strolled about: perhaps I came back here. There are three hours to account for—and I have forgotten them all.’

CHAPTER XXV

WILL HE REMEMBER?

SHOULD she tell him? She could not. The way must somehow be prepared. No—she could not tell him just so—in cold blood. How would he look if she were to begin: ‘I have found out the mystery. You are Edmund Gray. During the hours that you cannot recall, you are playing the part of a Socialist teacher and leader: you are actively propagating the doctrines that you hold to be dangerous and misleading’? What would he say? What would he feel when he realised the truth?

On the table lay a copy of the *Times*—a fortnight old copy—open at the place where there was a certain letter from a certain

Edmund Gray. Elsie pointed to it. Mr. Dering sighed. 'Again,' he said, 'they persecute me. 'Now it is a letter addressed to Edmund Gray, lying on my table : now it is the bill of a pernicious lecture by Edmund Gray : to-day it is this paper with the letter that appeared a week or two ago. Who brought it here? Checkley says he didn't. Who put it on my table?'

Elsie made no reply. It was useless to test her former theory of the boy under the table.

'As for the man who wrote this letter,' Mr. Dering went on, 'he bears the name of our forger and writes from the same address. Yet he is not the man. Of that I am convinced. This man is a fool because he believes in the honesty of mankind : he is a generous fool because he believes that people would rather be good than bad. Nonsense ! They would rather be stealing from each other's plates, like the monkeys, than dividing openly. He has what they call a good heart—that is,

he is a soft creature—and he is full of pity for the poor. Now, in my young days, I was taught—what after-experience has only brought more home to me—that the poor are poor in consequence of their vices. We used to say to them: “Go away—practise thrift. Be sober—work hard. By exercising these virtues we rose out of your ranks. By continuing to exercise them we remain on these levels. Go away. There is no remedy for disease contracted by vice. Go away and suffer.” That’s what we said formerly. What they say now is: “Victims of greed! You are filled with every virtue possible to humanity. You are down-trodden by the Capitalist. You are oppressed. Make and produce for others to enjoy. We will change all this. We will put the fruits—the harvest—of your labour in your own hands, and you shall show the world your justice, your noble disinterestedness, your generosity, your love of the common weal.” That’s the new gospel, Elsie, and I prefer the old.’

Strange that a man should at one time hold and preach with so much fervour and earnestness the very creed which at another time he denounced as fiercely !

‘This man, and such as he,’ continued Mr. Dering, lifted out of his anxieties by that subject, ‘would destroy Property in order to make the workman rich. Wonderful doctrine ! He would advance the world by destroying the only true incentive and stimulant for work, invention, civilisation, association, and every good and useful thing. He would destroy Property. And then ? Can he not see what would follow ? Why, these people do not know the very alphabet of the thing. By Property they mean the possession by individuals of land or money. But that is only a part of Property. Take that away, and the individual remains. And he has got—what you cannot take away—the rest of his Property, by which he will speedily repair the temporary loss. Consider, child, if you can, what does a man possess ? He has, I say,

Property—all his own—which cannot be taken from him or shared with another—Property in his brain, his trade, his wit, his craft, his art, his skill, his invention, his enterprise, his quickness to grip an opportunity. Again, he has his wife and children—sometimes a very valuable Property: he has, besides, his memories, his knowledge, his experience, his thoughts, his hopes, his projects, and intentions: he has his past and he has his future: he has, or thinks he has, his inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven. Take away all these things bit by bit, what is left? Nothing. Not even the shadow of a man. Not even a naked figure. This, Elsie, is Property. These things separate the individual from the mass and each man from his neighbour. A shallow fanatic, like this Edmund Gray, thinks that wealth is the whole of Property. Why, I say, it is only a part of Property: it is the external and visible side of certain forms of Property. Take all the wealth away to-day—even if you make ten thousand laws, the same qualities—

the same forms of Property—the same lack of those qualities will produce like results to-morrow.—Do you now understand, child, what is meant by Property? It is everything which makes humanity. Wealth is only the symbol or proof of society so organised that all these qualities—the whole Property of a man, can be exercised freely and without injustice.’

‘I see,’ said Elsie, gazing with wonder undisguised. Was this last night’s Prophet? Could the same brain hold two such diverse views?

‘You are surprised, child. That is because you have never taken or understood this larger view of property. It is new to you. Confess, however, that it lends sacredness to things which we are becoming accustomed to have derided. Believe me, it is not without reason that some of us venerate the laws which have been slowly, very slowly, framed: and the forms which have been slowly, very slowly, framed: as experience has

taught us wisdom for the protection of man—working man, not loafing, lazy man. It is wise and right of us to maintain all those institutions which encourage the best among us to work and invent and distribute. By these forms alone is industry protected and enterprise encouraged. Then such as this Edmund Gray—he laid his hand again upon the letter—‘will tell you that Property—Property—causes certain crimes—ergo, Property must be destroyed. Everything desirable causes its own peculiar class of crime. Consider the universal passion of Love. It daily causes crimes innumerable. Yet no one has yet proposed the abolition of Love—eh?’

‘I believe not,’ Elsie replied, smiling. ‘I hope no one will—yet.’

‘No. But the desire for Property, which is equally universal—which is the most potent factor in the cause of Law and Order—they desire and propose to destroy. I have shown you that it is impossible. Let the companies pay no dividends, let all go to the working

men : let the lands pay no rent : the houses no rent : let the merchants' capital yield no profit : to-morrow the clever man will be to the front again, using for his own purposes the dull and the stupid and the lazy. That is my opinion.—Forgive this sermon, Elsie. You started me on the subject. It is one on which I have felt very strongly for a long time. In fact, the more I think upon it the more I am convinced that the most important thing in any social system is the protection of the individual—personal liberty : freedom of contract : right to enjoy in safety what his ability, his enterprise, and his dexterity may gain for him.'

Elsie made no reply for a moment. The conversation had taken an unexpected turn. The vehemence of the upholder of Property overwhelmed her as much as the earnestness of its destroyer. Besides, what chance has a girl of one-and-twenty on a subject of which she knows nothing with a man who has thought upon it for fifty years ? Besides, she

was thinking all the time of the other man. And now there was no doubt—none whatever—that Mr. Dering knew nothing of Mr. Edmund Gray—nothing at all. He knew nothing and suspected nothing of the truth. And which should she believe? The man who was filled with pity for the poor and saw nothing but their sufferings, or the man who was full of sympathy with the rich and saw in the poor nothing but their vices? Are all men who work oppressed? Or are there no oppressed at all, but only some lazy and stupid and some clever?

‘Tell me more another time,’ she said, with a sigh. ‘Come back to the case—the robbery. Is anything discovered yet?’

‘I have heard nothing. George refuses to go on with the case out of some scruple because’——

‘Oh! I know the cause. Very cruel things have been said about him. Do you not intend to stand by your own partner, Mr. Dering?’

‘To stand by him? Why, what can I do?’

‘You know what has been said of him—what is said of him—why I have had to leave home’——

‘I know what is said, certainly. It matters nothing what is said. The only important thing is to find out—and that they cannot do.’

‘They want to connect Edmund Gray with the forgeries, and they are trying the wrong way. Checkley is not the connecting link—nor is George.’

‘You talk in riddles, child.’

‘Perhaps. Do you think, yourself, that George has had anything whatever to do with the business?’

‘If you put it so, I do not. If you ask me what I have a right to think—it is that everything is possible.’

‘That is what you said about Athelstan. Yet now his innocence is established.’

‘That is to say, his guilt is not proved. Find me the man who forged that cheque,

and I will acknowledge that he is innocent. Until then, he is as guilty as the other man—Checkley—who was also named in connection with the matter. Mind, I say, I do not believe that my Partner could do this thing. I will tell him so. I have told him so. If it had to be done over again, I would ask him to become my partner. But all things are possible. My brother is hot upon it. Well—let him search as he pleases. In such a case the solution is always the simplest and the most unexpected. I told him only this morning—he had lunch with me—that he was on a wrong scent—but he is obstinate. Let him go on.’

‘Yes—let him divide a family—keep up bitterness between mother and son—make a lifelong separation between those who ought to love each other most —— Oh! it is shameful! It is shameful! And you make no effort—none at all—to stop it.’

‘What can I do? What can I say, more than I have said? If they would only

not accuse each other—but find out something !’

‘Mr. Dering—forgive me—what I am going to say’—she began with jerks. ‘The honour of my brother—of my lover—are at stake.’

‘Say, child, what you please.’

‘I think that perhaps’—she did not dare to look at him—‘if you could remember sometimes those dropped and forgotten evenings—those hours when you do not know what you have said and done—if you could only remember a little—we might find out more.’

He watched her face blushing, and her eyes confused, and her voice stammering, and he saw that there was something behind—something that she hinted, but would not or could not express. He sat upright, suspicious and disquieted.

‘Tell me what you mean, child.’

‘I cannot—if you do not remember anything. You come late in the morning—some-

times two hours late. You think it is only ten o'clock when it is twelve. You do not know where you have been for the last two hours. Try to remember that. You were late on Saturday morning. Perhaps this morning. Where were you ?'

His face was quite white. He understood that something was going—soon—to happen.

'I know not, Elsie—indeed—I cannot remember. Where was I ?'

'You leave here at five. You have ordered dinner, and your housekeeper tells me that you come home at ten or eleven. Where are you all that time ?'

'I am at the Club.'

'Can you remember ? Think—were you at the Club last night ? George went there to find you, but you were not there—and you were not at home. Where were you ?'

He tried to speak—but he could not. He shook his head—he gasped twice.

'You cannot remember ? Oh ! try—Mr. Dering—try—for the sake of everybody—to

put an end to this miserable condition—try.’

‘I cannot remember,’ he said again feebly.

‘Is it possible—just possible—that while you are away—during these intervals—you yourself may be actually—in the company—of this Socialist—this Edmund Gray?’

‘Elsie—what do you mean?’

‘I mean—can you not remember?’

‘You mean more, child! Do you know what you mean? If what you suggest is true, then I must be mad—mad. Do you mean it? Do you mean it? Do you understand what you say?’

‘Try—try to remember,’ she replied. ‘That is all I mean. My dear guardian, is there any one to whom I am more grateful than yourself? You have given me a fortune and my lover an income. Try—try to remember.’

She left him without more words.

He sat looking straight before him—the horror of the most awful thing that can befall

a man upon him. Presently, he touched his bell, and his old clerk appeared.

‘Checkley,’ he said, ‘tell me the truth.’

‘I always do,’ he replied surlily.

‘I have been suffering from fits of forgetfulness. Have you observed any impairing of the faculties? When a man’s mental powers are decaying, he forgets things: he loses the power of work: his old skill leaves him: he cannot distinguish between good work and bad. He shows his mental decay, I believe, in physical ways—he shuffles as he walks; he stoops and shambles—and in his speech—he wanders and he repeats—and in his food and manner of eating. Have you observed any of these symptoms upon me, Checkley?’

‘Not one. You are as upright as a lance: you eat like five-and-twenty: your talk is as good and your work is as good as when you were forty.—Don’t think such things. To be sure you do forget a bit. But not your work. You only forget sometimes what you did out

of the office—as if that matters. Do you remember the case you tackled yesterday afternoon?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Do you tell me that any man—forty years younger than you—could have tackled that case more neatly? Garn! Go ’long!’

Checkley went back to his office.

‘What did she mean by it, then?’ Mr. Dering murmured. ‘Who put her on to such a suspicion? What did she mean by it? Of course it’s nonsense.’ So reassuring himself, he yet remained disquieted. For he could not remember.

At half-past five or so, Mr. Edmund Gray arrived at his Chambers. The outer door was closed, but he found his disciple waiting for him. She had been there an hour or more, she said. She was reading one of the books he had recommended to her. With the words of Mr. Dering in her ears, she read as if two voices were speaking to her—talking to each other across her.

She laid down the book and rose to greet him. 'Master,' she said, 'I have come from Mr. Dering. He is your solicitor, you told me.'

'Assuredly. He manages my affairs.'

'It is curious—I asked him if he knew you—and he said that he knew nothing about you.'

'That is curious, certainly. My solicitor for—for many years. He must have mistaken the name. Or—he grows old—perhaps he forgets people.'

'Do you often see him?'

'I saw him this morning. I took him my letter to the *Times*. He is narrow—very narrow, in his views. We argued the thing for a bit. But, really, one might as well argue with a stick as with Dering when Property is concerned. So he forgets, does he? Poor old chap! He forgets—well—we all grow old together!' He sighed. 'It is his time to-day and mine to-morrow.—My Scholar, let us talk.'

The Scholar left her Master at seven. On her way out she ran against Checkley, who was prowling round the court. 'You!' he cried. 'You! Ah! I've caught you, have I? On Saturday afternoon I thought I see you going into No. 22. Now I've caught you coming out, have I?'

'Checkley,' she said, 'if you are insolent, I shall have to speak to Mr. Dering;' and walked away.

'There's another of 'em,' Checkley murmured, looking after her—'a hardened one, if ever there was. All for her lover and her brother! A pretty nest of 'em. And calls herself a lady!'

CHAPTER XXVI

THE LESSON OF THE STREET

‘CHILD,’ said the Master, ‘it is time that you should take another lesson.’

‘I am ready. Let us begin.’ She crossed her hands in her lap and looked up obedient.

‘Not a lesson this time from books. A practical lesson from men and women, boys and girls, children and infants in arms. Let us go forth and hear the teaching of the wrecks and the slaves. I will show you creatures who are men and women mutilated in body and mind—mutilated by the social order. Come, I will show you, not by words, but by sight, why Property must be destroyed.’

It was seven o’clock, when Mr. Dering

ought to have been thinking of his dinner, that Mr. Edmund Gray proposed this expedition. Now, since that other discourse on the sacredness of Property, a strange thing had fallen upon Elsie. Whenever her Master spoke and taught, she seemed to hear, following him, the other voice speaking and teaching exactly the opposite. Sometimes—this is absurd, but many true things are absurd—she seemed to hear both voices speaking together: yet she heard them distinctly and apart. Looking at Mr. Dering, she knew what he was saying: looking at Mr. Edmund Gray, she heard what he was saying. So that no sooner had these words been spoken, than, like a response in church, there arose the voice of Mr. Dering. And it said: ‘Come. You shall see the wretched lives and the sufferings of those who are punished because their fathers or themselves have refused to work and save. Not to be able to get Property is the real curse of labour. It is no evil to work provided one chooses the work and

creates for one's self Property. The curse is to have to work for starvation wages at what can never create property, if the worker should live for a thousand years.'

Of the two voices she preferred the one which promised the abolition of poverty and crime. She was young : she was generous : any hope of a return of the Saturnian reign made her heart glow. Of the two old men—the mad man and the sane man—she loved the mad-man. Who would not love such a man? Why, he knew how to make the whole world happy ! Ever since the time of Adam we have been looking and calling out and praying for such a man. Every year the world runs after such a man. He promises, but he does not perform. The world tries his patent medicine, and is no better. Then, the year after, the world runs after another man.

Elsie rose and followed the Master. It was always with a certain anxiety that she sat or talked with him. Always she dreaded lest, by some unlucky accident, he should

awaken and be restored to himself suddenly and without warning—say in his Lecture Hall. How would he look? What should she say? ‘See—in this place for many years past you have in course of madness preached the very doctrines which in hours of sanity you have most reprobated. These people around you are your disciples.’ You have taught them by reason and by illustration with vehemence and earnestness to regard the destruction of property as the one thing needful for the salvation of the world. What will you say now? Will you begin to teach the contrary? They will chase you out of the Hall for a madman. Will you go on with your present teaching? You will despise yourself for a madman.’ Truly a difficult position. Habit, however, was too strong. There was little chance that Edmund Gray among his own people, and at work upon his own hobby, would become Edward Dering.

They went out together. He led her—

whither? It mattered not. North and South and East and West you may find everywhere the streets and houses of the very poor hidden away behind the streets of the working people and the well-to-do.

The Master stopped at the entrance of one of those streets—it seemed to Elsie as if she was standing between two men both alike, with different eyes. At the corner was a public-house with swinging doors. It was filled with men talking, but not loudly. Now and then a woman went in or came out, but they were mostly men. It was a street long and narrow, squalid to the last degree, with small two-storied houses on either side. The bricks were grimy; the mortar was constantly falling out between them: the woodwork of doors and windows was insufferably grimy: many of the panes were broken in the windows. It was full of children: they swarmed: they ran about in the road, they danced on the pavement, they ran and jumped and laughed as if their lot was the happiest in the

world and their future the brightest. Moreover, most of them, though their parents were steeped in poverty, looked well fed and even rosy. 'All these children,' said Mr. Edmund Gray, 'will grow up without a trade: they will enter life with nothing but their hands and their legs and their time. That is the whole of their inheritance. They go to school, and they like school: but as for the things they learn, they will forget them, or they will have no use for them. Hewers of wood and drawers of water shall they be: they are condemned already. That is the system: we take thousands of children every year, and we condemn them to servitude—whatever genius may be lying among them. It is like throwing treasures into the sea, or burying the fruits of the earth. Waste! Waste! Yet, if the system is to be bolstered up, what help?'

Said the other Voice: 'The world must have servants. These are our servants. If they are good at their work, they will rise and

become upper servants. If they are good upper servants, they may rise higher. Their children can rise higher still, and their grandchildren may join us. Service is best for them. Good service, hard service, will keep them in health and out of temptation. To lament because they are servants is foolish and sentimental.'

Standing in the doorways, sitting on the doorsteps, talking together, were women—about four times as many women as there were houses. This was because there were as many families as rooms, and there were four rooms for every house. As they stood at the end of the street and looked down, Elsie observed that nearly every woman had a baby in her arms, and that there were a great many types or kinds of women. That which does not surprise one in a drawing-room, where every woman is expected to have her individual points, is noticed in a crowd, where, one thinks, the people should be like sheep—all alike.

‘A splendid place, this street, for such a student as you should be, my Scholar.’ The Master looked up and down—he sniffed the air, which was stuffy, with peculiar satisfaction: he smiled upon the grubby houses. ‘You should come often: you should make the acquaintance of the people: you will find them so human, so desperately human, that you will presently understand that these women are your sisters. Change dresses with one of them: let your hair fall wild: take off your bonnet’——

‘Shall I then be quite like them?’ asked Elsie. ‘Like them, Master? Oh! not quite like them.’

‘Not quite like them,’ he said. ‘No; you could never talk like them.’

He walked about among the people, who evidently knew him, because they made way for him, nodded to him, and pretended, such was their politeness, to pay no attention to the young lady who accompanied him.

‘Every one of them is a study,’ he con-

tinued. 'I could preach to you on every one as a text. Here is my young friend Alice Parden, for instance'—he stopped before a pale girl of seventeen or so, tall and slender, but of drooping figure, who carried a baby in her arms. 'Look at her. Consider. Alice is foolish, like all the Alices of this street. Alice must needs marry her chap a year ago, when she was sixteen and he was eighteen. Alice should be still at her club in the evening and her work in the daytime. But she must marry, and she is a child mother.—Is he out of work still?' Alice nodded, and hugged her baby closer. Mr. Edmund Gray shook his head in admonition, but gave her a coin, and went on. 'Now look at this good woman'—he stopped before a door where an Amazon was leaning—a woman five feet eight in height, with brawny arms and broad shoulders and a fiery furnace for a face—a most terrible and fearful woman.—'How are you this evening, Mrs. Moss? And how is your husband?'

Long is the arm of coincidence. Mrs. Moss was just beginning to repose after a row royal; she was slowly simmering and slowly calming. There had been a row royal, a dispute, an argument, a quarrel, and a fight with her husband. All four were only just concluded. All four had been conducted on the pavement, for the sake of coolness and air and space. The residents stood around: the controversy was sharp and animated: the lady bore signs of its vehemence in a bruise, rapidly blackening, over one eye, and abrasions on her knuckles. The husband had been conducted by his friends from the spot to the public-house at the corner, where he was at present pulling himself together, and forgetting the weight of his consort's fists, and solacing his spirit with strong drink.

‘How is my husband?’ the lady repeated. ‘Oh! I’ll tell you. I’ll tell you, Mr. Gray, how my husband is. Oh! how is he? Go look for him in the public-house. You shall see how he is and what he looks like.’ She

descended two steps, still retaining the advantage of the lowest. Then, describing a semi-circle with her right arm, she began an impassioned harangue. The residents fled, right and left, not knowing whether in her wrath she might not mistake the whole of them, collectively, for her husband. The men in the public-house hearing her voice, trembled, and looked apprehensively at the door. But Mr. Gray stood before her without fear. He knew her better than to run away. The lady respected his courage, and rejoiced in a sympathetic listener. Presently she ran down: she paused: she gasped: she caught at her heart: she choked: she wept. She sat down on the doorstep, this great strong woman, with the brawny arms and the fiery face, and she wept. The residents crept timidly back again and gathered round her, murmuring sympathy: the men in the public-house trembled again. Mr. Gray grasped her by the hand and murmured a few words of consolation; for indeed there were great

wrongs, such as few wives even in this street expect, and undeniable provocations. Then he led his Scholar away.

At the next house he entered, taking Elsie with him to a room at the back where a woman sat making garments. She was a middle-aged woman, and though very poorly dressed, not in rags: the room was neat except for the garments lying about. She looked up cheerfully—her eyes were bright, her face was fine—and smiled. ‘You here, Mr. Gray?’ she said. ‘Well, I was only thinking yesterday how long it is since you came to see me last. I mustn’t stop working, but you can talk.’

‘This is a very special friend of mine,’ said the Master. ‘I have known her for ten years, ever since I began to visit the street. She is always cheerful: though she has to live on sweating work and sweating pay. She never complains. She lives like the sparrows, and eats about as much as a sparrow: she is always respectable. She

goes to church on Sundays: she is always neat in her dress. Yet she must be always hungry.'

'Ah!' said the woman, 'you'd wonder, Miss, if you knew how little a woman can live upon.'

'Oh! but,' said Elsie, 'to have always to live on that little!'

'She is the daughter of a man once thought well to do.'—'He was most respectable,' said the woman.—'He died, and left nothing but debts. The family were soon scattered, and—you see—this street contains some of those who have fallen low down as well as those who are born low down. It is Misfortune Lane as well as Poverty Lane. To the third and fourth generation, misfortune, when it begins—the reason of its beginning is the wickedness of one man—still persecutes and follows the family.'

'Thank you, Miss,' said the woman. 'And if you will come again sometimes —— Oh! you needn't be afraid. No one would

hurt a friend of Mr. Gray.' So they went out.

On the next doorstep and the next and the next, there sat women old and young, but all of these had the same look and almost the same features—they were heavy-faced, dull-eyed, thick-lipped, unwashed, and unbrushed. 'These,' said the Master, 'are the women who know of nothing better than the life they lead here. They have no hope of rising: they would be unhappy out of this street. They bear children: they bring them up, and they die. It is womanhood at its lowest. They want warmth, food, and drink, and that is nearly all. They are the children and grandchildren of women like themselves, and they are the mothers of women like themselves. Savage lands have no such savagery as this, for the worst savages have some knowledge, and these women have none. They are mutilated by our system. We have deprived them of their souls. They are the products of our system. In a better order

these people could not exist: they would not be allowed parents or birth. The boy would still be learning his trade, and the girl would be working at hers. That little woman who meets her troubles with so brave a heart has been sweated all her life—ever since her misfortunes began: she takes it as part of the thing they call life: she believes that it will be made up to her somehow in another world. I hope it will.'

'All these people,' said the other Voice, 'are what they are because of the follies and the vices of themselves and their fathers. The boy-husband has no trade. Whose fault is that? The rickety boy and the rickety girl bring into the world a rickety baby. Whose fault is that? Let them grow worse instead of better until they learn by sharper suffering that vice and folly bring their punishment.'

'You see the children,' continued the Master, 'and the mothers. You do not see any old men, because this sort mostly die before

they reach the age of sixty Those who are past work and yet continue to live go into the House. The girls you do not see because those who are not forced to work all the evening as well as all the day are out walking with their sweethearts. Nor the men because they are mostly in the public-house. They are all hand-to-mouth working men : they live by the job when they can get any. When they are out of work, they live upon each other. We hide this kind of thing away in back streets like this, and we think it isn't dangerous. But it is. Formerly, the wreckage huddled together bred plagues and pestilences, which carried off rich and poor with equal hand, and so revenged itself. In other ways, the wreckage revenges itself still.'

'This kind of people,' said the other Voice, 'may be dangerous. We have a Police on purpose to meet the danger. They would be quite as dangerous if you were to give them free dinners and house them without rent. The class represents the untameable element.

They are always a danger. To cry over them is silly and useless.'

They walked down the street. Everybody knew Mr. Edmund Gray. He had a word for all. It was evident that he had been a visitor in the street for a long time: he had the air of a proprietor: he entered the houses and opened doors and sat down and talked, his disciple standing beside him and looking on. He asked questions and gave advice—not of a subversive Socialistic kind, but sound advice, recognising the order that is, not the order that should be.

All the rooms in this street were tenanted, mostly a family to each. In many of them work was going on still, though it was already eight o'clock. Sometimes it would be a woman sitting alone in her room like a prisoner in a cell, stitching for dear life: sometimes three or four women or girls sitting all together, stitching for dear life: sometimes a whole family, little children and all, making matches, making canvas bags, making paper

bags, making card-boxes, all making—making—making for dear life. And the fingers did not stop and the eyes were not lifted, though the visitors opened the door and came in and asked questions, to which one replied in the name of all the rest.

It is an old, old story—everybody knows the slum: people go to gaze upon it; it is one of the chief sights of Victorian London, just as a hundred and fifty years ago it was one of the sights to see the women flogged at Bridewell. Not such a very great advance in civilisation, perhaps, after all.

‘It is a hive—the place is swarming with life,’ said the girl, who had never before seen such a street.

‘Life means Humanity. All these people are so like you, my Scholar, that you would be surprised. You would not be like them if you were dressed in these things, but they are like you. They want the same things as you—they have the same desires—they suffer the same pains. What makes your happiness?

Food—warmth, sufficiency, not too much work. These are the elements for you as well as for them. In my system they will have all these—and then perhaps they will build up, as you have done, an edifice of Knowledge, Art, and Sweet Thoughts. But they are all like you. And most in one thing. For all women of all classes, there is one thing needful. These girls, like you, want love. They all want love. Oh, child! they are so like you, so very like you—these poor women of the lowest class. So very like their proud sisters.’ He paused for a moment. Elsie made no reply. ‘You see,’ he continued, ‘they are so hard at work that they cannot even lift their eyes to look at you—not even at you, though they seldom see a girl among them so lovely and so well dressed. One would have thought—but there is the Whip that drives—that dreadful Whip—it hangs over them and drives them all day long without rest or pause. Their work pays their rent and keeps them alive. It just keeps them alive, and that is

all. No more. It must be hard to work all day long for another person—if you come to think of it. Happily, they do not think. And all this grinding poverty—this terrible work, that one family may be able to live in a great house and to do nothing.’

‘They are working,’ said the other Voice, ‘because one man has had the wit to create a market for their work. His thrift, his enterprise, his clearness of sight, have made it possible for these girls to find the work that keeps them. If they would have the sense not to marry recklessly, there would be fewer working girls, and wages would go up. If their employer raised their wages only a penny a day, he would benefit them but little and would ruin himself. They must learn—if they can—the lesson of forethought by their own sufferings. No one can help them.’

As Mr. Edmund Gray walked into the houses and out again Elsie went with him, or she waited outside while he went in. Some-

times she heard the chink of coin : sometimes she heard words of thanks. The Socialist, whatever he taught, practised the elementary form of charity possible only for those who have money. Elsie remarked this little point, but said nothing.

‘What you see here,’ said the Master, ‘is the lowest class of all—if one ever gets to the lowest level. For my own part, I have seen men and women so wretched that you would have called them *miserrimi*—of all created beings the most wretched. Yet have I afterwards found others more wretched still. In this street are those who make the lowest things : those who can make nothing, and have no trade, and live on odd jobs : and those who can neither make nor work, but thief and lie about.’

‘I see all that ; but, dear Master, what will your new order do for such people ? Will it make those who will not work industrious ?’

‘It will give every producer the fruits of

his own labour : it will teach a trade to every man, and find men work. And those who cannot work, it will kill, or lock up until they die. They shall have no children. Perhaps it will kill them all. It might be better. We will have no human failures in our midst. That street is full of lessons, all calling aloud for the destruction of Property.'

Then the other Voice spoke : 'The presence of the human failure is a lesson always before us—a warning and a lesson to rich and poor alike. As he is, so all may be. None are so rich but they may be brought to poverty : none so poor but they may be poorer. So far from hiding away the wreckage, it is always in our sight. It prowls about the streets : we can never escape it. And it fills all hearts with terror : it spurs all men to industry and invention and perseverance. The human failure inspires a never-ending hymn in praise of Property.'

Elsie's guide stopped to greet a woman whom he knew. She had the usual baby on her

arm. She was a sad-faced woman, with some refinement in her looks: she was wretchedly dressed, thin, pale, and dejected.

‘The same story?’

‘Yes, sir. It’s always the same,’ she sighed hopelessly. ‘But he would work if he could get anything to do. Nobody will employ a man who’s had a misfortune. It’s hard—because such a thing may happen to anybody. It’s like measles, my husband says. He can’t get drunk because there’s no money. That’s my only comfort.’

He gave her some money, and she passed on her way.

‘Her husband was a clerk,’ Mr. Gray explained, ‘who took to drink and robbed his employer. His father was a barrister, who died young. His grandfather was a well-known—almost a great lawyer. I know the whole family history. I learned it’—— He stopped for a moment, as if his memory suddenly failed him—‘somehow—a long time ago. It is a story which shows how our sins

and follies fall upon our own children. This family sprang from the gutter. First, the working man : then his son the shopkeeper : then his grandson, who became a great lawyer : then his great-grandson, not so great a lawyer. He, you see, is the first of the family who begins life as a gentleman and is brought up among gentlemen : he inherited money : he had a practice : he married in the class called gentle, and had children. But he lost all his money and in despair he killed himself. Cousinly affection is a cold thing at best. It helped the widow to a pittance, and sent her boys to a cheap school. At fifteen they had to take whatever employment they could get. Observe that this branch of the family was now going down-hill very fast. The future of a boy who has been taught no trade and has entered no profession is black indeed. One of the boys went out to New Zealand, which has little to give a friendless boy : another enlisted, served three years, and has never got any work since. I believe

he carries boards about the street. Another became a tenth-rate actor, and now starves on fifteen shillings a week, paid irregularly. Another—the youngest—was put into a merchant's office. He rose to a hundred and twenty pounds a year: he married a girl of the clerkly class—that woman you saw: he took to drink: he embezzled his master's money: he went to prison: he is now hopelessly ruined. He cannot get any lower in the social scale. What will his children do? They have no friends. They will grow up like the children around them: they will join the hopeless casuals: they will be hewers of wood. Property, my child, Property—has done this. He stole. In our society nobody will be tempted to steal. He drank—with us he would be kept judiciously under control until he could be trusted again. That would be the care of the State. He is another victim of Property. When his grandfather was framing Acts of Parliament for the protection of Property, he did not dream that he was

making another engine for the oppression of his grandchildren.'

Said the other Voice: 'We rise by our virtues. We sink by our vices. Let these people suffer. Their sufferings should make the rest of us wiser. Teach the children to rise again as their great-grandfather rose. Do not contend against the great Law which metes out suffering in return for vice.'

'Those,' continued the Socialist Professor, 'who do most to make a few men rich are the real enemies of what they suppose themselves to be defending. Given a thousand women sweated for one man, and there presently arises indignation either among the women or among the bystanders. From indignation we get revolution, because the employer never gives way. He cannot. He would lose, if he did, his wealth, which is his Heaven. If you divide the thousand women into companies of ten, each company under its own sweater, and all the sweaters under other sweaters, you make a hierarchy of

sweaters, culminating in one at the top. That was the old state of things. The man at the top was a Chief, a Patriarch : he knew his people : he sweated them, but kindly : he tossed them crumbs : he looked after the sick and the old. Now all this is changing. The old family tie—such as it was—is dissolved. The man at the top has disappeared : a Board of Directors has taken his place : there is nothing left but the Board and its employees. The men who work are no longer interested in the business of the firm, except so far as their pay is concerned. Their pay will go up and the dividends will go down. And with every increase of wages so much Property is destroyed. Let everything—everything—be turned into Companies to help the destruction of Property.’

Said the other Voice : ‘Property is strengthened by being diffused. Companies organise labour : they give capital its proper power : they are not easily intimidated : they interest all who can save anything. Let us turn into

Companies every industrial and distributive business in the country.'

'All times of change,' the Master went on, 'are times of interest. We are living at a time when great changes are impending—the greatest changes possible. Before great changes there is always a period of unconscious preparation. The minds of people are being trained. Without any perception of the fact, old ideas are dying out and new ones are coming into existence. When the Revolution actually arrives, everybody is ready for it and nobody is surprised. It was so with the Reformation. For a hundred years and more the idea of the Great Revolt had been slowly growing in men's minds. When it came at last, there was no surprise and there were few regrets. For a hundred years and more the ideas of the French Revolution had been talked about by philosophers: these ideas sank down among the people. Nobody was surprised, not even the nobles themselves, when the end came. So with

our Revolution. It is coming—it is coming—its ideas are no longer timidly advanced—here and there—by a fanatic here or a philosopher there: they are lying in the hearts of the people ready to spur them into action: they are helping on the cause by successive steps, every one of which means nothing less than the abolition of Property. These things are new to you, child. You were only born yesterday or the day before. I was born a hundred years ago or thereabouts. Consider again’—he leaned against a lamp-post for greater ease, and discoursed as one addressing an audience—‘Consider, I say, this great question of companies and their results. Formerly, one man made things which he took to market—sold or exchanged, and went home again. He, by himself, did everything. Then one man made and another man sold. The next improvement was for twenty men to work, for one to receive and to collect their work, and for another to sell it. In this way the twenty remained poor, and the two became

rich. So they went on, and trade flourished, and the twenty producers more and more fell into the power of the two, who were now very rich and strong. Now the merchants are forming themselves into companies, and the companies are amalgamating with each other, and the small people may contemplate ruin. For these—now merchants, shopkeepers, manufacturers, workmen—there will be nothing but service in the companies; no possibility of acquiring Property, nothing but service all their lives. Now do you see how that helps the cause? They will become accustomed to work, but not for themselves: they will grow accustomed to work for a bare living and no more: they won't like either: but they will ask why the second should go with the first: the two great obstacles to Socialism will be removed. Then—either the step I spoke of just now—the abolition of the dividends—or, which is just as likely, a revolution, when the servants of the companies shall make the State take over all and work.

them for the good of all. Some there are who think that the workman will have hope and power for union crushed out of him. I think not; but if so—woe to the rich! The Jacquerie and the French Revolution will be spoken of as mild ebullitions of popular feeling compared with what will happen then. But I think not. I do not believe that the working man will sink again. He has got up so far. But he needs must climb higher.

‘You think it would be impossible’—by this time a small crowd had got round them, but the speaker still addressed his disciple as if no one else at all was listening—‘for the State to take over the great producing and distributing companies. But it has been done already. The State has the Post and the Telegraph Services. They will deal with railways, steamers, coaches, cabs, omnibuses, trams, canals, water, gas, electric light, breweries, bakeries, factories, shops, just as they have dealt with these two. The State can take it

all. The State will take the management of all. But, you say, the shares of the company will become Funds. They will, and the Funds will pay interest—but the interest will become rapidly lower and lower, so that what was once five per cent. is now but two and a half, and before long shall be two—one and a half—one—and nothing at all. There will be no cry of spoliation, because the holders of stock will be forced gradually into looking more and more to their own efforts, and because widows and sick people and old people, to whom the stocks were once so useful, will be all provided for by the State as a matter of right, and without any of the old humiliation of pauperdom. Pauper! Oh, heavenly word! Child, in the world of the future—the world which you will help to mould, we shall all be paupers,—every one.'

He spoke with fine enthusiasm, his face lit up, his eyes bright. The girl was almost carried away, until the other Voice began coldly and judicially:

‘ Nothing is so good for man as to be ruled and kept in discipline, service, and subjection. It is a foolish and a mischievous dream which supposes all men eager for advance. The mass of mankind asks for no advancement. It loves nothing and desires nothing but the gratification of the animal. Give it plenty of animalism and it is satisfied. That condition of society which keeps the mass down and provides for the rise of the ambitious few is the only condition which is reasonable and stable. Base your social order on the inertness of the mass. Make the workman do a good day’s work : pay him enough, so that he shall have some of the comforts he desires : educate the clever boy and make him foreman, head-man, manager, or artist, journalist, dramatist, novelist. Give him the taste for wealth. Let him have some. Then he, too, will be ready to fight if necessary in the army of order.’

While the other Voice was speaking, there came slouching around the corner into the street where he held the fifth—perhaps the

tenth part of a room, a really excellent specimen of the common or London thief, the habitual criminal. He was a young man—the habitual criminal is generally young, because in middle and elderly life he is doing long sentences—he had a furtive look, such as that with which the jackal sallies forth on nocturnal adventures: he had a short slight figure, a stooping and slouching gait, and narrow shoulders. His eyes were bright, but too close together: his mouth was too large and his jowl too heavy: his face was pale, his hair was still short, though growing rapidly: his hands were pendulous: his round hat was too big for his little head: he wore a long loose overcoat. His face, his figure, his look proclaimed aloud what he was.

He stopped at the corner and looked at the little crowd. Everybody, for different reasons, is attracted by a crowd. Professionals sometimes find in crowds golden opportunities. This crowd, however, was already dispersing. The speaker had stopped.

Perhaps they had heard other and more fervid orators on the Socialist side. Perhaps they were not in the least interested in the subject. You see, it is very difficult to get the hand-to-mouth class interested in anything except those two organs.

‘This street,’ said the Master, observing him with professional interest, ‘is full—really full—of wealth for the observer. Here is a case now—an instructive though a common case.’ The fellow was turning away disappointed, perhaps, at the melting of the crowd and any little hope he might have based upon their pockets. ‘My friend’—he heard himself called, and looked round suspiciously—‘you would like, perhaps, to earn a shilling honestly, for once.’

He turned slowly : at the sight of the coin held up before him, his sharp eyes darted right and left to see what chance there might be of a grab and a bolt. Apparently, he decided against this method of earning the shilling. ‘What for?’ he asked.

‘By answering a few questions. Where were you born?’

‘I dunno.’

‘Where were you brought up? Here?—In this street? Very well. You went to school with the other children: you were taught certain subjects up to a certain standard. What trade were you taught?’

‘I wasn’t taught no trade.’

‘Your father was, I believe, a thief?’—The lad nodded.—‘And your mother, too?’—He nodded again, and grinned.—‘And you yourself and your brothers and sisters are all in the same line, I suppose?’—He nodded and grinned again.—‘Here is your shilling.’ The fellow took it, and shuffled away.

‘Father—mother—the whole family, live by stealing. Where there is no Property there can be no theft. In our world, such a creature would be impossible. He could not be born: such parents as his could not exist with us: he could not be developed: there would be no surroundings that would make

such a development possible. He would be what, I believe, men of science call a Sport: he would be a deformity. We should put him in a hospital and keep him there until he died.'

'In that world,' said the other Voice, 'there would be deformities of even a worse kind than this—the deformities of hypocrisy and shams. By a thousand shifts and lies and dishonesties the work of the world would be shifted on the shoulders of the weak. The strong man has always used his strength to make the weak man work for him, and he always will. The destruction of Property would be followed by the birth of Property on the very self-same day. There is the power of creation—of invention—which is also a kind of Property. Laws cannot destroy that power. Laws cannot make men industrious. Laws cannot make the strong man work for the weak. Laws cannot prevent the clever man from taking advantage of the stupid man. When all the failures—all the

deformities—have been killed off, the able man will still prey upon the dull-witted. Better let the poor wretch live out his miserable life, driven from prison to prison, an example for all the world to see.'

It was at this point that Elsie discovered the loss of her purse. Her pocket had been picked by one of the intelligent listeners in the crowd. She cried out on finding what had happened, in the unphilosophic surprise and indignation with which this quite common accident is always received.

'Child,' said the Master, 'when there is no longer any Property, money will vanish: there will be no purses; even the pocket will disappear, because there will no longer be any use for a pocket.—Did the purse contain much? Suppose you had nothing to lose and nothing to gain. Think of the lightness of heart, the sunshine on all faces, which would follow. I fear you are rich, child. I have observed little signs about you which denote riches. Your gloves are neat

and good ; your dress seems costly. Better far if you had nothing.'

'Master, if I were like that girl on the other side, would you like me better? Could I be more useful to the cause if I dressed like her?'

The girl was of the common type—they really do seem, at first, all alike—who had on an ulster and a hat with a feather and broken boots.

'If I were like her,' Elsie went on, 'I should be ignorant—and obliged to give the whole day to work, so that I should be useless to you—and my manners would be rough and my language coarse. It is because I am not poor that I am what I am. The day for poverty is not come yet, dear Master.'

'In the future, dear child, there shall be no poverty and no riches. To have nothing will be the common lot. To have all will be the common inheritance. Oh! there will be differences: men shall be as unlike then as

now : we shall not all desire the same things. You and such as you will desire Art of every kind. You shall have what you desire. In our world, as in this, like will to like. You shall have the use for yourselves of pictures, of musical instruments, of everything that you want. The rest of the world will not want these things. If they do, more can be made. You shall have dainty food—the rest of the world will always like coarse and common fare. Think not that we shall level up or level down. All will be left to rise or to sink. Only they shall not starve, they shall not thieve, they shall not be sweated. Oh ! I know they paint our society as attempts to make all equal. And they think that we expect men no longer to desire the good things in the world. They will desire them—they will hunger after them—but there will be enough for all. The man who is contented with a dinner of herbs may go to a Carthusian convent, which is his place, for we shall have no place for him in a world which recognises

all good gifts and assigns to every man his share.'

Then spoke the other Voice, but sadly :
'Dreams! Dreams! There are not enough of the good things to go round—good things would become less instead of more. Without the spur there is no work. Without the desire of creating Property, all that is worth anything in life will perish—all but the things that are lowest and the meanest and the commonest. Men will not work unless they must. By necessity alone can the finest work be ordered and executed. As men have been, so will men always be. The thing that hath been, that shall be again.'

'You have learned some of the lessons of Poverty Lane, Scholar,' said the Master.—
'Let us now go home.'

CHAPTER XXVII

‘I KNOW THE MAN’

‘ANOTHER evening of mystery, Elsie?’ said Athelstan.

‘Yes. Another, and perhaps another. But we are getting to an end. I shall be able to tell you all to-day or to-morrow. The thing is becoming too great for me alone.’

‘You shall tell us when you please. Meantime, nothing new has been found out, I believe. Checkley still glares, George tells me. But the opinion of the clerks seems on the whole more favourable, he believes, than it was. Of that, however, he is not perhaps a good judge.’

‘They shall all be turned out,’ cried Elsie. ‘How dare they so much as to discuss’——

‘My sister, it is a very remarkable thing,

and a thing little understood, but it is a true thing. People, people—clerks and *le Service* generally—are distinctly a branch of the great human tribe. They are anthropoid. Therefore, they are curious and prying and suspicious. They have our own faults, my dear.'

All day Elsie felt drawn as with ropes to Mr. Dering's office. Was it possible that after that long evening among the lessons of Poverty Lane he should remember nothing? How was she to get at him—how was she to make him understand or believe what he had done? Could she make the sane man remember the actions and words of the insane man? Could she make the insane man do something which would absolutely identify him with the sane man? She could always array her witnesses: but she wanted more: she wanted to bring Mr. Dering himself to understand that he was Mr. Edmund Gray.

She made an excuse for calling upon him. It was in the afternoon, about four, that she

called. She found him looking aged, his face lined, his cheek pale, his eyes anxious.

‘This business worries me,’ he said. ‘Day and night it is with me. I am persecuted and haunted with this Edmund Gray. His tracts are put into my pockets; his papers into my safe: he laughs at me: he defies me to find him. And they do nothing. They only accuse each other. They find nothing.’

‘Patience,’ said Elsie softly. ‘Only a few days—a day or two—then—with your help—we will unravel all this trouble. You shall lose nothing.’

‘Shall I escape this mocking devil—this Edmund Gray?’

‘I cannot promise. Perhaps.—Now, my dear guardian, I am to be married next Wednesday. I want you to be present at my wedding.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because things have been said about George: and because your presence will effectually prove that you do not believe them.’

‘Oh ! Believe them ? I believe nothing. It is, however, my experience that there is no act, however base, that any man may not be tempted to do.’

‘Happily, it is my experience,’ said the girl of twenty-one, ‘that there is no act of baseness, however small, that certain men could possibly commit. You will come to my wedding, then. Athelstan will give me away.’

‘Athelstan ? Yes ; I remember. We found those notes, didn’t we ? I wonder who put them into the safe ? Athelstan ! Yes. He has been living in low company, I heard—Camberwell.—Rags and tatters.’

‘Oh !’ Elsie stamped impatiently. ‘You will believe anything—anything, and you a lawyer ! Athelstan is in the service of a great American journal.—Rags and tatters !’

‘American ? Oh ! yes.’ Mr. Dering sat up and looked interested. ‘Why, of course. How could I forget it. Had it been yesterday evening, I should have forgot. But it is four

years ago. He wrote to me from somewhere in America. Where was it? I've got the letter. It is in the safe. Bring me the bottom right-hand drawer. It is there, I know.' He took the drawer which Elsie brought him, and turned over the papers. 'Here it is among the papers of that forgery. Here is the letter.' He gave it to Elsie. 'Read it. He writes from America, you see. He was in the States four years ago—and—and—— What is it?'

'Oh!' cried Elsie, suddenly springing from her chair—'Oh! Do you know what you have given me? Oh! do you know what you have told me? It is the secret—the secret—of my fortune. Oh! Athelstan gave it to me—Athelstan—my brother!'

Mr. Dering took the letter from her and glanced at the contents. 'I ought not to have shown you the letter,' he said. 'I have violated confidence. I forgot. I was thinking of the trouble—I forgot. I forget everything now—the things of yesterday as well as the

things of to-day. Yes ; it is true, child : your little fortune came to you from your brother. But it was a secret that he alone had the right to reveal.’

‘And now I know it—I know it. Oh ! what shall I say to him ?’ The tears came in her eyes. ‘He gave me all he had—all he had—because—oh ! for such a simple thing—because I would not believe him to be a villain. Oh ! my brother—my poor brother ! He went back into poverty again. He gave me all because—oh ! for such a little thing !—Mr. Dering !’ She turned almost fiercely upon him. ‘After such a letter, *could* you believe that man to be a villain ? Could you ? Tell me ! After such a deed and such a letter !’

‘I believe nothing. My experience, however, tells me that any man, whoever he is, may be led to commit’——

‘NO ! I won’t have it said again.—Now, listen, Mr. Dering. These suspicions must cease. There must be an end. Athelstan

returned six weeks ago—or thereabouts. That can be proved. Before that time, he was working in San Francisco on the journal. That can be proved. While these forgeries, with which he is now so freely charged, were carried on here, he was abroad. I don't ask you to believe or to disbelieve or to bring up your experience—oh! such experience—one would think you had been a police magistrate all your life.'

'No, Elsie.' Mr. Dering smiled grimly. 'There was no need to sit upon the bench; the police magistrate does not hear so much as the family solicitor. My dear, prove your brother's innocence by finding out who did the thing. That is, after all, the only thing. It matters nothing what I believe—he is not proved innocent—all the world may be suspected of it—until the criminal is found. Remove the suspicions which have gathered about your lover by finding the criminal. There is no other way.'

‘Very well, then. I will find the criminal, since no one else can.’

Mr. Dering went on without heeding her words.

‘They want to get out a warrant against Edmund Gray. I think, for my own part, that the man Edmund Gray has nothing to do with the business. He is said to be an elderly man and a respectable man—a gentleman—who has held his Chambers for ten years.’

‘They need not worry about a warrant, Elsie replied. ‘Tell your brother, Mr. Dering, that it will be perfectly useless. Meantime—I doubt if it is any good asking you—but—if we want your help, will you give me all the help you can?’

‘Assuredly. All the help I can. Why not? I am the principal person concerned.

‘You are, indeed,’ said Elsie gravely—‘the principal person concerned. Very well, Mr. Dering—now I will tell you more. I know the—the criminal. I can put my hand upon

him at any moment. It is one man who has done the whole, beginning with the cheque for which Athelstan was suspected—one man alone.'

'Why, child, what can you know about it? What can you do?'

'You were never in love, Mr. Dering—else you would understand that a girl will do a great deal—oh! a great deal more than you would think—for her lover. It is not much to think for him and to watch for him—and for her brother—the brother who has stripped himself of everything to give his sister!' She was fain to pause, for the tears which rose again and choked her voice.

'But, Elsie—what does this mean? How can you know what no one else has been able to find out?'

'That is my affair, Mr. Dering. Perhaps I dreamed it.'

'Do you mean that you will get back all the papers—all the transfers—the dividends that have been diverted—everything?'

‘Everything is safe. Everything shall be restored.—My dear guardian, it is a long and a sad story. I cannot tell you now. Presently, perhaps. Or to-morrow. I do not know how I shall be able to tell you. But for your property, rest easy. Everything will come back to you—everything—except that which cannot be stored in the vaults of the Bank.’

The last words he heard not, or understood not.

‘I shall get back everything!’ The eyes of the Individualist lit up and his pale cheek glowed—old age has still some pleasures. ‘It is not until one loses Property that one finds out how precious it has become. Elsie, you remember what I told you, a day or two ago. Ah! I don’t forget quite everything—a man is not the shivering naked soul only, but the complete figure, equipped and clothed, armed and decorated, bearing with him his skill, his wit, his ingenuity, his learning, his past, and his present, his memories and his

rejoicings, his sorrows and his trials, his successes and his failures, and his Property—yes—his Property. Take away from him any of these things, and he is mutilated : he is not the perfect soul. Why, you tell me that my Property is coming back—I awake again. I feel stronger already ; the shadows are flying before me : even the terror of that strange forgetfulness recedes : and the haunting of Edmund Gray. I can bear all, if I get my Property back again. As for this forger—this miscreant—this criminal—you will hale him before the judge’——

‘ Yes—yes. We will see about the miscreant afterwards. The first thing is to find the man and recover your Property, and to dispel the suspicions resting on innocent persons. If I do the former, you must aid me in the latter.’

‘ Assuredly. I shall not shrink from that duty.’

‘ Very well.—Now tell me about yourself. Sometimes it does good to talk about our

own troubles. Tell me more about these forgetful fits. Do they trouble you still?' Her eyes and her voice were soft and winning. One must be of granite to resist such a voice and such eyes.

'My dear'—Mr. Dering softened. 'You are good to interest yourself in an old man's ailments. It is *Anno Domini* that is the matter with me. The forgetful fits are only symptoms—and the disease is incurable. Ask the oak why the leaves are yellow.—It is the hand of winter. That is my complaint. First the hand of winter, then the hand of Death. Meantime, the voice of the grasshopper sings loud and shrill.' In presence of the simple things of age and death, even a hard old lawyer grows poetic.

'Tell me the symptoms, then. Do you still forget things?'

'Constantly. More and more. I forget everything.'

'Where were you yesterday evening, for instance?'

‘I don’t know. I cannot remember. I have left off even trying to remember. At one time I racked my brain for hours, to find out, and failed. Now I remember nothing. I never know when this forgetfulness may fall upon me. At any hour.—For instance—you ask me about yesterday evening. I ordered dinner at home. My housekeeper this morning reminded me that I did not get home last night till eleven. Where was I? Where did I spend the evening?’

‘At the Club?’

‘No—I took a cab this morning and drove there under pretence of asking for letters. I asked if I was there last night. The hall porter stared. But I was not there. I thought that I might have fallen asleep there. I have done so before. Checkley tells me that I went away before him. Where was I?—Child!’—he leaned forward and whispered, with white cheeks—‘I have read of men going about with disordered brains doing what they afterwards forget. Am I one of these unfortunates? Do

I go about with my wits wandering? Oh! horrible! I picture to myself an old man—such as myself—of unblemished reputation and blameless life—wandering about the streets demented—without conscience—without dignity—without self-respect—committing follies—things disgraceful—even things which bring men before the law’—— He shuddered. He turned pale.

‘No—no,’ murmured Elsie. ‘You could not. You could never’——

‘Such things are on record. They have happened. They may happen again. I have read of such cases. There was a man once—he was like myself—a Solicitor—who would go out and do things, not knowing what he did. They found him out at last doing something so incredibly foolish that there was but one explanation. In another man and a younger man it would have been worse than foolish: it would have been criminal. Then they gave him a companion, and he discovered what he had done. The shame and the shock

of it killed him. I have thought of that man of late. Good Heavens! Think, if you can, of any worse disaster. Let me die—let me die, I say, rather than suffer such a fate—such an affliction. I see myself brought before the magistrate—me—myself—at my age, charged with this and with that. What defence? None, save that I did not remember.’

‘That could never be,’ said Elsie confidently, because she knew the facts. ‘If such a thing were to befall, your character would never be changed. You might talk and think differently, but you could never be otherwise than a good man. You to haunt low company? Oh! you could not even in a waking dream. People who dream, I am sure, always remain themselves, however strangely they may act. How could you—you—after such a life as yours, become a haunter of low company? One might perhaps suppose that Athelstan had been living among profligates because he is young and untried—but you?—you? Oh no. If you had these waking dreams—

perhaps you have them—you would become—you would become—I really think you would become'—she watched his face—'such—such a man as—as—Mr. Edmund Gray, who is so like yourself, and yet so different.'

He started. 'Edmund Gray again? Good Heavens! It is always Edmund Gray!'

'He is now a friend of mine. I have only known him for a week or two. He does not think quite as you do. But he is a good man. Since, in dreams, we do strange things, you might act and speak and think as Edmund Gray.'

'I speak and think as—— But—am I dreaming? Am I forgetting again? Am I awake? Edmund Gray is the man whom we want to find.'

'I have found him,' said Elsie quietly.

'The forger—if he is the forger'——

'No—no. Do not make more mistakes. You shall have the truth in a day or two. Would you like to see Edmund Gray? Will you come with me to his Chambers?

Whenever you call, you—you, I say—will find him at home.'

'No—no. I know his doctrines—futile doctrines—mischievous doctrines. I do not wish to meet him. What do you mean by mistakes? There are the letters—there are the forgeries. Are there two Edmund Grays?'

'No—only one. He is the man they cannot find. I will show you, if you like, what manner of man he is.'

'No. I do not want to see a Socialist. I should insult him.—You are mysterious, Elsie. You know this man, this mischievous doctrinaire—this leveller—this spoliator. You tell me that he is a good man—you want me to see him. What, I ask, do these things mean?'

'They mean many things, my dear guardian. Chiefly they mean that you shall get back your Property, and that suspicion shall be removed from innocent persons—and all this, I hope, before next Wednesday, when I

am to be married. We must all be happy on my wedding day.'

'Will—will Mr. Edmund Gray be there as well?'

'He has promised.—And now, my dear guardian, if you will come round to Gray's Inn with me, I will show you the Chambers of Mr. Edmund Gray.'

'No—no. Thank you, Elsie—I do not wish to make the personal acquaintance of a Socialist.'

'He has Chambers on the second floor. The principal room is large and well furnished. It is a wainscoted room with two windows looking on the Square. It is not a very pretty Square, because they have not made a garden or laid down grass in the middle—and the houses are rather dingy. He sits there in the evening. He writes and meditates. Sometimes he teaches me, but that is a new thing. In the morning he is sometimes there between nine o'clock and twelve. He has an old laundress, who pretends to keep his rooms clean.'

She murmured these words softly, thinking to turn his memory back and make him understand what had happened.

‘They are pleasant rooms, are they not?’ He made no reply—his eyes betrayed trouble. She thought it was the trouble of struggling memory.—‘He sits here alone and works. He thinks he is working for the advancement of the world. There is no one so good, I think, as Edmund Gray.’

He suddenly pushed back the chair and sprang to his feet.

‘My Scholar! You speak of me?’

It was so sudden that Elsie cried out and fell backwards in her chair. She had brought on the thing by her own words, by conjuring up a vision of the Chambers. But—the trouble was not the struggle of the memory getting hold of evasive facts.

‘Why, child,’ he remonstrated, ‘you look pale. Is it the heat? Come, it is cooler outside. Let us go to the Chambers in Gray’s Inn. This old fellow—this Dering—here he

sits all day long. It is Tom Tiddler's ground. It is paved with gold, which he picks up. The place—let us whisper—because he must be in the outer office—it reeks of Property — reeks of Property.'

He took his hat and gloves. 'My Scholar, let us go.' By force of habit, he shut and locked the safe and dropped the bunch of keys in his pocket.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ATHELSTAN'S DISCOVERY

ON the evening of that same day the same discovery was made by another of the persons chiefly concerned.

You have seen that Athelstan on his return made haste to find out the commissionaire who had presented the forged cheque. Happily, the man remembered not only the circumstance itself but also his employer on that occasion. A generosity far above what is commonly found among those who employ the services of that corps endeared and preserved the memory of the day. He had received, in fact, half a sovereign for an eighteenpenny job; and the commissionaire is not like the cabby, to whom such windfalls

are common. Not at all. With the former we observe the letter of the law.

After eight years this man's memory was rewarded. This thrice blessed job produced yet more golden fruit. Heard one ever of a more prolific job?

After breakfast, Athelstan was informed that a commissionnaire desired to speak with him. It was his one-armed friend.

'Beg your pardon, sir,' he said, saluting after the military manner—'you said I was to come and tell you, first thing, if I found your man for you.'

'Certainly. I told you also that I would give you a five-pound reward for finding my man, as you call him. Well—I will be as good as my word if you have found him.'

'I saw him yesterday. The very same old gentleman that sent me to the Bank that day. He's older, and he doesn't look so jolly, and he walks slower; but I knew him at once.'

‘Oh! are you quite sure? Because a resemblance, you know’——

‘Well, sir, I can swear to him. I remember him as well as I remember anybody. He sat in the chair, and he laughed, and he said: “You’ve been quick over the job, my man. There’s something extra, because you might have dropped the money down a grating, or run away with it, or something,” he says. “Here’s half a sovereign for you, my man,” says he; “and I daresay you can do with it.” “I can so, sir,” I says, “and with as many more like them as I can pick up.” Then he laughed, and I laughed, and we both laughed. —And that’s the same man that I saw yesterday evening.’

‘Oh! this is very curious. Are you quite sure?’

‘I’d swear to him anywhere. A man can’t say fairer.’

‘No—as you say—a man can hardly say fairer, can he? Now, then, when did you see him?’

‘It was between six and seven. I’d been doing a message for a gentleman in the Strand—a gentleman in the dining-room line to a gentleman in Holborn in the sausage and tripe line—and I was going back with a letter, and going through Lincoln’s Inn for a short cut. Just as I was getting near the gate to the Fields, I saw coming out of the door at No. 12 the very man you want to find. I wasn’t thinking about him, not a bit—I was thinking of nothing at all, when he come out of the door and walked down the steps. Then I knew him. Lord! I knew him at once. “You’re the man,” I says to myself, “as give me the half-sov. instead of eighteenpence.” Well, I stood at the corner and waited to see if he would remember me. Not a bit of it. He stared at me hard, but he never recollected me a bit—I could see that. Why should he? Nobody remembers the servant any more than they remember the private in the ranks. The very same old gentleman; but he’s grown older, and he didn’t

look jolly any more. P'raps he's lost his money.'

'Came out of No. 12, did he? Why, Dering & Son's office is there. What does this mean?'

'I thought I'd like to find out something more about him; and I thought that a five-pound note was better worth looking after than eighteenpence—so I let the letter from the tripe and sausage man lay a bit, and I followed my old gentleman at a good distance.'

'Oh! you followed him. Very good. Did you find out where he lived? I can tell you that. He went to No. 22 South Square, Gray's Inn.'

'No; he didn't, sir.—But you are not very far wrong. He went through Great Turnstile; then he crossed Holborn and turned into Featherstone Buildings, which is all lodging-houses. But he doesn't live there. He walked through the Buildings, and so into Bedford Row, and he stopped at a house there'——

'What! In Bedford Row?'

‘Yes; in Bedford Row—and he pulls out a latch-key and lets himself in. That’s where he lives. No. 49 Bedford Row, on the west side, very near the bottom. He lives in Bedford Row.—Well, sir, I like to do things proper, and so, to make the job complete, I went to the *Salutation*, Holborn, where they keep a Directory, and I looked out his name. The gentleman that lives at No. 49 Bedford Row is named Edward Dering—and among the names of No. 12 New Square, Lincoln’s Inn, is the name of Dering & Son.—So, sir, I don’t think it is too much to say that your man is Mr. Dering, who belongs both to Bedford Row and Lincoln’s Inn. He’s the man who sent me to the Bank eight years ago.’

Athelstan stared at him. ‘He the man?’ he cried. ‘You are talking impossibilities. He can’t be the man.’

‘Nobody else, sir. If that was Mr. Dering that I saw yesterday walking home from New Square to Bedford Row—he’s the man who sent me for the money.’

To this statement the man stuck firm. Nor could he be moved by any assertion that his position was impossible. 'For, my friend,' said Athelstan, 'the man who sent you with the cheque was the man who robbed Mr. Dering.'

'Can't help that, sir. If the gentleman I saw yesterday walking from Lincoln's Inn to Bedford Row was Mr. Dering—then he robbed himself.'

'That's foolishness. Oh! there must be some explanation. Look here! Mr. Edward Dering leaves his office every evening between six and seven. I will be in New Square on the west side this evening at six. You be there, as well. Try not to seem as if you were watching for anybody. Stand about at your ease.'

'I'll make it sentry-go, sir,' said the old soldier. 'I'll walk up and down in front of the door same as some of our chaps got to do in front of shops. You trust me, sir, and I won't take no notice of you.'

This little plot, in fact, was faithfully carried out. At six o'clock Athelstan began to walk up and down outside the gate which opens upon Lincoln's Inn Fields—the commissionnaire at the same time was doing sentry-go in front of No. 12 in New Square. When the clock struck six there was a rush and a tramp of hurrying feet ; these were the clerks set free for the day. There are not many solicitors' offices in New Square, and these once gone, the place becomes perfectly quiet. At half-past six there was the footfall as of one man on the stairs, and he descended slowly. He came out of the door presently, an old bent figure with white hair and shrivelled face. Paying no heed to the sentry, he walked away with feeble step in the direction of Chancery Lane. Checkley this was, on his way to look after his tenants and his property.

Athelstan looked after him, through the gate. Then he called his old soldier. 'See

that man?' he asked. 'That's the man who sent you to the Bank.'

'No—he isn't.' The man was stout on that point. 'Not a bit like him. That old man's a servant, not a gentleman. See the way he holds his hands. Never a gentleman yet carried his hands that way. You can always tell 'em by their hands. The other day I met an old pal—seemed to forget me, he did. Wanted to make out that he'd never been in the army at all. So I lay by for a bit. Then I gets up—and he gets up too. "Tention," says I, and he stood to 'tention like a good old Tommy Atkins. You watch their hands whatever they say. Always tell 'em by their hands. That old man he's a servant. He isn't a gentleman. He can't sit among the swells and order about the waiters. He hasn't learned that way. He'd get up himself, if you asked him, and put the napkin under his arm and bring you a glass of sherry wine. He's not my man. You wait a bit.'

At a quarter to seven another footstep was heard echoing up and down the empty building. Then an old man, erect, thin, tightly buttoned, wearing neat gloves and carrying an umbrella, came out of the door. His face was hard, even austere. His walk was firm. The Sentry, as this person walked out of the gate, followed at a distance. When he was beside Athelstan, he whispered: 'That's the man. I'd swear to him anywhere. That's the man that sent me to the Bank.'

Athelstan heard in unbounded astonishment. That the man? Why—it was Mr. Dering himself!

'Let us follow him,' he whispered. 'Not together. On opposite sides of the road. Good Heavens! This is most wonderful. Do not lose sight of him.'

To follow him was perfectly easy, because Mr. Dering turned neither to the right nor to the left, but marched straight on through Great Turnstile, across Holborn, through Featherstone Buildings, and into Bedford

Row. At No. 49, his own house. Where else should he stop?

Athelstan took out his purse and gave the man the five pounds. 'I don't know what it means,' he said. 'I can't understand a word. But I suppose you have told me the truth. I don't know why you should make up a lie'——

'It's Gauspel Truth,' said the man.

'And therefore again—I don't understand it. Well—I've got your name and your number. If I want you again I will send for you.'

The man saluted and walked away. Half a sovereign for an eighteenpenny job, and eight years afterwards five pounds on account of the same job. Robbery, was it? Robbery—and the old man pretending to rob himself. Now what did that mean? Laying it on to some poor harmless innocent cove, the soldier guessed: laying it on to some one as he had a spite against—the old villain—very likely this young governor—most likely—Donation

on account of that same job, very likely—the old villain!

As for Athelstan, he returned to Lincoln's Inn Fields, where, the evening being fine and the sun warm and the place quiet except for the children at play, he walked up and down the east or sunny side for half an hour turning the thing over in his mind.

For, you see, if Mr. Dering went through the form of robbing himself and finding out the robbery and coldly suffering the blame to fall upon himself—then Mr. Dering must be one of the most phenomenally wicked of living men. Or, if Mr. Dering robbed himself, and did not know it—then Mr. Dering must be mad.

Again, if such a thing could be done on a small scale, it might be done on a larger scale with the same result—namely, suspicion to fall upon a blameless person; obloquy to gather round his name—for in some cases simply to be charged is almost as fatal as to be convicted: and perfect impunity for him-

self. 'This is not my own writing, but a forgery,' said the man who had been robbed. Then, who is the forger? You—you. None but you. The bare suspicion becomes a certainty in the minds of those who were once that man's friends.—And his life is cankered at the outset. He thought of his own life; the bitterness of alienation and exile. Never any time for eight years when he could explain the reasons of his exile. Debt, the cultivation of wild oats, failure to pass examinations—anything would do for such a reason except suspicion of forgery. Athelstan was a cheerful young man. He seldom allowed himself to be cast down by the blows of fate. Nevertheless, during his whole time of exile, the drop of bitterness that poisoned his cup was that he could not tell the whole story because the world would believe no more than half—that half, namely, which contained the accusation. When one walks about thinking, there comes a time when it seems no good to think any longer.

The mind can only get a certain amount out of a case at one sitting. That amount absorbed, the best thing is to go on to something else. Athelstan went on to dinner. He left his sister to the care of her young man, and dined by himself. He took a steak at a Holborn restaurant with an evening paper, which he considered professionally. After dinner he returned to his subject. Perhaps he should get a step farther. No—perhaps on account of the sweet influence of dinner he got no farther at all. Here was an astonishing fact. How to account for it? You have seen—by one of two ways—malignity unspeakable : or madness—madness of a very curious kind—the madness of a man whose calm cold judgment had made him appear to his friends as one with an intellect far above any ordinary weaknesses of humanity. Mr. Dering mad? Then the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Speaker of the House of Commons, the President of the Royal Society, the President of the Institute of Civil Engineers, the Cambridge

Professors of Mathematics—all these men might be mad as well. And nobody to know it or to suspect it. Mr. Dering mad! and yet, if not, what was he?

There was one way. He had tried it already once. He left the restaurant and turned eastwards. He was going to try South Square, Gray's Inn, again. Perhaps Mr. Edmund Gray would be in his rooms.

He was not. The door was shut. But the opposite door stood open, that of Freddy Carstone. Athelstan knocked, and was admitted with eloquence almost tumultuous.

‘Just in time,’ said the coach. ‘I’ve got a new brand of whisky, straight from Glasgow. You shall sample it. Have you had dinner yet? So have I. Sit down. Let us talk and smoke tobacco and drink whisky and soda.’

‘I will do the talking and the tobacco at any rate.’

‘I love Virtue,’ said Freddy. ‘She is a lovely goddess—for “if Virtue feeble were, Heaven itself would stoop to her.” She has

only one fault. There is reproach in her voice, reproach in her eye, and reproach in her attitude. She is an uncomfortable goddess. Fortunately, she dwells not in this venerable foundation. Do not imitate Virtue, old boy. Let me—— That's right. We shall then start fair upon the primrose path—the broad and flowery way—though I may get farther down than you. Athelstan the Wanderer—Melmoth the Wanderer—Childe Harold the Pilgrim—drink and be human.' He set the example. 'Good whisky—very good whisky. Athelstan, there's a poor devil upstairs, starving for the most part—let's have him down. It's a charity.' He ran up-stairs, and immediately returned with the decayed Advocate, who looked less hungry than usual, and a shade less shabby—you have seen how he borrowed of Mr. Edmund Gray through Elsie.

'Now,' said the host, 'I call this comfortable; a warm August evening; the window open; a suspicion of fresh air from the

gardens ; soda and whisky ; and two men for talk. Most evenings one has to sit alone. Then there's a temptation to—to close the evening too quickly.'

'Freddy, I want to hear more about your neighbour. You told me something, if you remember, a week or two ago.'

'Very odd thing. Old Checkley at the *Salutation* is always pestering about Mr. Edmund Gray. What has he to do with Mr. Edmund Gray? Wanted me to answer his questions.'

'And me,' said Mr. Langhorne. 'I did answer them.'

'Well—Mr. Edmund Gray is—— What is he? An old gentleman of cheerful aspect, who is apparently a Socialist. We must all be allowed our little weaknesses. All I ask for is'—— He reached his hand for the whisky. 'This old gentleman carries his hobbies so far as to believe in them seriously. I've talked to him about them.'

'I have heard him lecture at Camden

Town,' said the Barrister. 'I go there sometimes on Sunday evening. They have a tea-feast with ham and cake and toast. It is a pleasant gathering. It reminds one of the Early Church.'

'Well, Athelstan, what else can I tell you? Hark!' There was a step heard ascending the stairs. 'I believe that is the old man himself. If it is, you shall see him. I will bring him in.'

He went out to meet the unknown footstep on the landing. He greeted the owner of that footstep: he stopped him: he persuaded him to step into the opposite room. 'You must be lonely, Mr. Gray, sitting by yourself. Come in and have an hour's talk. Come in. This way. The room is rather dark. Here is Mr. Langhorne, your overhead neighbour, whom you know; and here is Mr. Athelstan Arundel, whom you don't know. Those who do know him like him, except for his Virtue, which is ostentatious in one so young.'

It was now nearly nine o'clock. The lamp

was not lit, and the room lay in twilight. It is the favourite shade for ghosts. A ghost stood before Athelstan, and shook hands with him—the ghost of Mr. Dering.

‘I am happy’—the ghost held out his hand—‘to make your acquaintance, Mr. Arundel. An old man, like myself, makes acquaintances, but not friends. His time for new friendships is gone. Still, the world may be full of pleasant acquaintances.’

He sat down, taking a chair in the window : the shade of the curtain fell upon his face so that nothing could be seen but a white circle.

‘Let us have candles, Freddy,’ said Athelstan.

‘By all means.’ Freddy lit a lamp on the table and two candles on the mantel-shelf. By their light the lineaments and figure of the ghost came out more distinctly. Athelstan gazed on it with bewilderment ; his head went round : he closed his eyes : he tried to pull himself together.

He sat up : he drank half a glass of whisky

and soda, he stared steadily at the figure he had not seen for eight years, since—— Good Heavens! and this man had done it himself! And he was as mad as a hatter.

Mr. Edmund Gray looked serenely cheerful. He lay back in the long chair, his feet extended and crossed : his elbows on the arms of the chair, his finger-tips touching ; his face was wreathed with smiles ; he looked as if he had always found the world the best of all possible worlds.

Athelstan heard nothing of what was said. His old friend Freddy Carstone was talking in his light and airy way, as if nothing at all mattered. He was not expected to say anything. Freddy liked to do all the talking for himself—therefore he sat watching a man under an illusion so extraordinary that it made him another man. Nothing was changed in him—neither features nor voice nor dress—yet he was another man. ‘Why,’ asked Athelstan, ‘why did he write that cheque for seven hundred and twenty pounds?’

Presently Freddy stopped talking, and Mr. Edmund Gray took up the conversation. What he said—the doctrines which he advanced, we know already. ‘And these things,’ said Athelstan to himself, ‘from those lips! Is it possible?’

At ten o’clock Mr. Edmund Gray rose. He had to write a letter; he prayed to be excused. He offered his hand again to Athelstan. ‘Good-night, sir,’ he said. ‘To the pleasure of seeing you again.’

‘Have we never met before, Mr. Gray?’ Athelstan asked.


‘I think not. I should remember you, Mr. Arundel, I am sure,’ Mr. Gray replied politely. ‘Besides, I never forget a face. And yours is new to me.—Good-night, sir.’

CHAPTER XXIX

CHECKLEY SEES A GHOST

To Checkley, watching every evening, though not always at the same time, sooner or later the same discovery was certain to come. It happened, in fact, on Friday evening, the day after Athelstan shook hands with Mr. Edmund Gray. On that night he left the office between six and seven, walked to his lodgings in Clerkenwell, made himself a cup of tea, and hurried back to Gray's Inn. Here he planted himself, as usual, close to the passage in the north-east corner of South Square, so that he could slip in on occasion and be effaced. Like many of the detective tribe, or like the ostrich, fount of many fables, he imagined himself by reason of this retreat entirely hidden from the observation of all. Of

course the exact contrary was the result. The Policeman regarded him with the liveliest curiosity : the laundresses watched him daily : the newspaper vendor came every evening from the gateway to see what this ancient spy was doing, and why he lurked stealthily in the passage and looked out furtively. He was one of the little incidents or episodes which vary the daily routine of life in the Inn. Many of these occur every year : the people who come to their offices at ten and go away at five know nothing about them : the residents who leave at ten and return at six or seven or twelve know nothing about them. But the Service know : and they talk and conjecture. Here was an elderly man—nay, an old, old man, apparently eighty years of age. What did he want, coming night after night to hide himself in a passage and peer out into the Square ? What, indeed ? The Policeman, who had done duty in Hyde Park, could tell instructive stories from his own experience about frisky age : the laundresses remembered



gentlemen for whom they had ‘done,’ and pranks with which those gentlemen amused themselves; but no one knew a case parallel to this. Why should an old man stand in the corner and secretly look out into the Square? He generally arrived at half-past seven, and he left his post at nine, when it was too dark to see across the Square. Then he went to the *Salutation* and enjoyed society, conversation, and a cheerful glass, as you have seen.

The time he chose was unfortunate, because Mr. Edmund Gray, when he called at his Chambers, generally did so at half-past six or seven, on his way to the Hall of Science, Kentish Town. Therefore, Checkley might have gone on watching for a long time—say an æon—watching and waiting in vain. But an accident happened which rewarded him richly for all his trouble. It was on Friday. Elsie, provided by this time with a latch-key to the Chambers, arrived at Gray’s Inn at six. She was going to spend the evening with the Master. She walked in, ascended the stair-

case—Mr. Gray had not yet arrived—opened the door, shut it behind her, and entered the room.

The hand of woman was now visible in the general improvement of the room. The windows were clean and bright: the wainscoted walls had been cleaned: the ceiling whitewashed: the carpet had been swept and the furniture dusted: there were flowers on the table: there was an easel, on which stood Elsie's fancy portrait of Mr. Dering, so wonderfully like Mr. Gray—a speaking likeness: books lay about the table—they were all books on the Labour Question: on the Social Question: on the Problems of the Day: all the books on all the questions with which men now torture themselves, and think thereby to advance the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. There were new curtains, dainty curtains, of lace, hanging before the windows: and the window-blinds themselves were clean and new. Elsie looked about her with a certain satisfaction: it was her own doing, the work

of her own hand, because the old laundress was satisfied to sit down and look on. 'At the least,' she said, 'the poor dear man has a clean room.' Then she remembered that in a day or two she would leave him to his old solitude, and she sighed, thinking how he clung to her and leaned upon her, and already looked upon her as his successor—'a clean room,' she said, 'when I have left him. Perhaps he will leave the room, too, and be all day long what he used to be.—Sane or mad? I love him best when he is mad.'

The table was covered with manuscripts. These were part of the great work which he was about to give to the world.

Elsie had never seen the room behind this. A guilty curiosity seized her. She felt like the youngest of Bluebeard's wives. She felt the impulse : she resisted : she gave way : she opened the door and looked in.

She found a room nearly as large as the sitting-room. The windows were black with dust and soot. She opened one, and looked

out upon a small green area outside, littered with paper and bottles and all kind of jetsam. The floor of the room was a couple of inches deep with dust: the chairs and the dressing-table were deep in dust. The bed was laid, but the blankets were devoured by moths: there was not a square inch left whole. It looked as if it had been brought in new and covered with sheets and blankets and so left, the room unopened, the bed untouched, for the ten years of Mr. Edmund Gray's tenancy.

Between the bedroom and the sitting-room was a small dark room, containing a bath, a table for washing up, knives and forks in a basket, teacups and saucers.

‘The pantry,’ said Elsie, ‘and the scullery, and the housemaid's closet, all together. Oh! beautiful! And to think that men live in such dens—and sleep there contentedly night after night in this lonely, ghostly old place. Horrible!’ A rattling behind the wainscoting warned her that ghosts can show themselves even in the daytime. She shuddered, and

retreated to the sitting-room. Here she took a book and sat by the open window, heedless of the fact that she could be seen by any one from the Square.

It was seven o'clock before Mr. Edmund Gray arrived. 'Ah! child,' he cried tenderly, 'you are here before me. I was delayed—some business. What was it? Pshaw! I forget everything. Never mind—I am here; and before we take a cab, I want you once more to go through with me the points of my new Catechism. Now, if you are ready.'

'Quite ready, Master.'

At half-past seven Checkley arrived at his corner and took a preliminary survey of the Square. 'There he is,' said the Policeman. 'There he is again,' said two laundresses conversing on a doorstep. 'There he is as usual,' said the newspaper man. 'Now,' asked all in chorus, 'what's he want there?'

Mr. Checkley looked out from his corner, saw no one in the Square, and retreated into

his passage. Then he looked out again, and retreated again. If any one passed through the passage, Checkley was always walking off with great resolution in the opposite direction.

Presently, in one of his stealthy peerings, he happened to look up. Then he started—he shaded his eyes: he looked his hardest. Yes; at the open window, freely displayed, without the least attempt at concealment, he saw the head and face of Miss Elsie Arundel. There! There! What more was necessary? Edmund Gray was Athelstan Arundel, or George Austin, or both—and Elsie Arundel was an accomplice after the act. There! There! He retreated to the seclusion of the passage and rubbed his hands. This would please Sir Samuel. He should hear it that very night. This ought to please him very much, because it made things so clear at last. There she was—upstairs, in the Chambers of Mr. Edmund Gray—in the very room! There! There! There!

Perhaps he was mistaken. But his sight was very good—for distant things. In reading a newspaper he might make mistakes, because he was one of those elderly persons who enjoy their newspaper most when they can nail it upon the wall and sit down to read it from the other side of a large room. He looked up again. The setting sun shining on the window of the side where he stood—the eastern side was reflected upon the windows of No. 22—Elsie's shapely head—she had taken off her hat—was bathed in the reflected sunshine. No doubt about her at all. There she was. There! There! There! The old man was fain to take a walk up Verulam Buildings and back again, to disguise his delight at this discovery. He walked chuckling and cracking his fingers, so that those who saw him—but there are not many in Raymond's Buildings on an August evening—thought that he must be either a little mad or a little drunk or a little foolish. But nobody much regards the actions of an ancient man. It is only the

respect of his grandchildren or the thought of his possessions that gives him importance. Only the strong are regarded, and an old man who looks poor gets no credit even for foolishness and silly chuckles. Then Checkley went back to his corner. Oh! what was that? He rubbed his eyes again. He turned pale: he staggered: he caught at the door-posts. What was that? He shaded his eyes and looked again—bent and trembling and shaking all over. Said the Policeman: ‘Looks as if he’s going to get ’em again.’ Said the laundresses: ‘He looks as if he’d seen a ghost.’ The newspaper boy stepped half-way across the Square. ‘He’s looking at Mr. Edmund Gray and the young lady. Jealous—p’raps—knows the young lady—wouldn’t have believed it, prob’ly.’

Yes—Checkley was looking at that window. No doubt of that at all. He was not able to disguise his astonishment: he no longer pretended to hide himself. For he saw, sitting in the window, the young lady

whom he believed to be an accomplice in the crime; and standing over her, with an expression of fatherly affection, was none other than Mr. Dering himself.

Yes — Mr. Dering. Most wonderful! What did it mean? Had Mr. Dering resolved to clear up the mystery of Edmund Gray? Had he penetrated the Chambers and found there—not Edmund Gray—but Elsie Arundel?

‘My friend,’ said the Policeman, standing before him so that the view of the window was intercepted, ‘you seem interested over the way.’

‘I am. I am. Oh! yes. Much interested.’

‘Well—don’t you think you’ve looked at that old gentleman long enough? Perhaps he wouldn’t like so much looking at. There’s a young lady, too. It isn’t manners to be staring at a young lady like a stuck pig.’

‘No—no, Policeman—I’ve seen enough—thank you.’

‘And, still talking in a friendly way, do you think Mr. Edmund Gray over there would like it if he knew there was a detective or a spy watching every evening on the other side of the Square? What’s the little game, guv’nor? Anything in our line? Not with that most respectable old gentleman, I do hope—though sometimes—— Well—what is it? Because we can’t have you goin’ on as you have a been goin’ on, you know.’

‘Policeman’—Checkley pulled him aside and pointed to the little group at the window—‘you see that old gentleman there—do you know him?’

‘Certainly. Known him ever since I came to the Inn—two years ago. The people of the Inn have known him for ten years, I believe. That’s Mr. Edmund Gray. He’s not one of the regular residents, and he hasn’t got an office. Comes here now and then when he fancies the place—Mr. Edmund Gray, that is. I wish all the gentlemen in the Inn were half as liberal as he is.’

‘Oh ! it’s impossible ! Say it again, Policeman. Perhaps I’m a little deaf—I’m very old, you know—a little deaf perhaps. Say it again.’

‘What’s the matter with the man ?’ For he was shaking violently, and his eyes stared. ‘Of course that is Mr. Edmund Gray.’

‘What does the girl do with him ? Why are they both there together ?’

‘How should I know why she calls upon him ? She’s a young lady, and a sweet young thing too. He’s her grandfather likely.’

Checkley groaned.

‘I must go somewhere and think this out,’ he said. ‘Excuse me, Policeman. I am an old man, and—and—I’ve had a bit of a shock and—— Good-evening, Policeman.’ He shaded his eyes again and looked up. Yes—there they were, talking. Then Elsie rose and he saw her putting on her hat. Then she retreated up the room. But still he stood watching.

‘Not had enough yet, guv’nor?’ asked the policeman.

‘Only a minute. I want to see her go out.—Yes—there they are—going out together. It is, after all—— Oh ! there is no mistake.’

‘There is no mistake, guv’nor,’ said the policeman. ‘There goes Mr. Edmund Gray, and there goes that sweet young thing along of him—Ah ! there’s many advantages about being a gentleman. No mistake, I say, about them two.—Now, old man, you look as if you’d had a surprise. Hadn’t you better go home and take a drop of something?’

It was earlier than Checkley generally went to the *Salutation*. But he delayed no longer. He tottered across the Square, showing very much of extreme feebleness, looking neither to the right nor to the left, his cheek white, his eyes rolling. The people looked after him, expecting that he would fall. But he did not. He turned into the tavern,

hobbled along the passage, and sank into an armchair in the parlour.

‘Good gracious, Mr. Checkley,’ cried the barmaid as he passed, ‘whatever is the matter?’

Some of the usual company were already assembled, although it was as yet hardly eight. The money-lender was there, sitting in his corner, taking his tobacco and his grog in silence. The decayed Barrister was there, his glass of old and mild before him, reading the morning newspaper. The ex-M.P. was there. When Checkley tumbled into the room, they looked up in surprise. When he gazed about him wildly and gasped, they were astonished, for he seemed like unto one about to have a fit.

‘Give me something, Robert—give me something,’ he cried. ‘Quick—something strong. I’ll have it short. Quick—quick!’

Robert brought him a small glass of brandy, which he swallowed hastily.

‘Oh!’ he groaned, sitting up, ‘I’ve seen—I’ve seen’——

‘You look as if you had seen a ghost,’ said the barmaid, who had come along with a glass of water. ‘Shall I bathe your forehead?’

‘No—no. I am better now—I am all right again.—Gentlemen’—he looked round the room solemnly—‘I’ve seen this evening a good man—an old man—a great man—a rich man, gentlemen, wrecked and cast away and destroyed and ruined. With a little devil of a woman to laugh at him!’

They don’t generally laugh at the men when they are ruined,’ said Mr. Langhorne. ‘They laugh while they are ruining them. It’s fun to them. So it is to the men. Great fun it is while it lasts. I daresay the little woman won’t really laugh at him. In my case’——

His case was left untold, because he stopped and buried his head in his newspaper.

Then Shylock spoke. He removed his

pipe from his lips and spoke, moved, after his kind, by the mention of the words wreck and ruin, just as the vulture pricks up its feathers at the word death.

‘To see a rich man wrecked and ruined, Mr. Checkley, is a thing which a man may see every day. The thing is not to lose by their wreck—to make money out of it. Rich men are always being wrecked and ruined. What else can you expect if men refuse to pay their interest and to meet their bills? The melancholy thing—ah! the real sadness—is the ruin of a man who has trusted his fellow creatures and got taken in for his pains. Only this morning I find that I’ve been let in by a swindler—a common swindler, gentlemen—who comes round and says he can’t pay up—can’t pay up—and I’m welcome to the sticks.—Which kind of man might your friend be, Mr. Checkley, the man who’s trusted his neighbour and got left—or the neighbour who’s ramped the man that trusted him?’

‘It isn’t money at all,’ Checkley replied.

‘Then, sir, if it isn’t money,’ said the money-lender, ‘I don’t know why you come in frightening this honourable company out of their wits. If it isn’t money, how the devil can the gentleman be wrecked and ruined?’

For two hours Mr. Checkley sat in silence, evidently not listening to what was said. Then he turned to Mr. Langhorne the Barrister: ‘You’ve known Mr. Edmund Gray a long time, I believe?’

‘Nine years—ten years—since he came to the Inn.’

‘Always the same man, I suppose?’ said Checkley. ‘Never another man—not sometimes a young man—or two young men—one rather a tall young man, looks as if the world was all his—supercilious beast?’

‘Never more than one man at once,’ replied the Barrister with a show of forensic keenness. ‘He might have been two young men rolled into one; but not to my knowledge: always the same man to look at, so

far as I know—and the same man to talk with.'

Oh! yes—yes. There's no hope left—none. He's ruined and lost and cast away and done for.'

He rose and walked out. The company looked after him and shook their heads. Then they drew their chairs a little closer, and the gap made by his departure vanished.

CHAPTER XXX

THE DAY AFTER THE GHOST

WHEN Mr. Dering arrived at his office next morning he observed that his table had not been arranged for him. Imagine the surprise of the housewife should she come down to breakfast and find the ham and the toast and the tea placed upon the table without the decent cloth ! With such eyes did Mr. Dering gaze upon the pile of yesterday's letters lying upon his blotting-pad, the pens in disorder, the papers heaped about anyhow, the dust of yesterday everywhere. Such a thing had never happened before in his whole experience of fifty-five years. He touched his bell sharply.

‘Why,’ he asked, hanging up his coat without turning round, ‘why is not my table

put in order?’ He turned and saw his clerk standing at the open door.—‘Good Heavens! Checkley, what is the matter?’

For the ancient servitor stood with drooping head and melancholy face and bent shoulders. His hands hung down in the attitude of one who waits to serve. But he did not serve. He stood still and he made no reply.

He understood now. Since the apparition of South Square he had had time to reflect. He now understood the whole business from the beginning to the end. One hand there was, and only one, concerned with the case. Now he understood the meaning of the frequent fits of abstraction, the long silences, this strange forgetfulness which made his master mix up days and hours, and caused him to wonder what he had done and where he had been on this and that evening. And somebody else knew. The girl knew. She had told her lover. She had told her brother. That was why the new Partner laughed and

defied them. It was on his charge that young Arundel had been forced to leave the country. It was he who declared that he had seen him place the stolen notes in the safe. It was he who had charged young Austin and whispered suspicions into the mind of Sir Samuel. Now the truth would come out, and they would all turn upon him, and his master would have to be told. Who would tell him? How could they tell him? Yet he must be told. And what would be done to the jealous servant? And how could the old lawyer, with such a knowledge about himself, continue to work at his office? All was finished. He would be sent about his business. His master would go home and stay there—with an attendant. How could he continue to live without his work to do? What would he do all day? With whom would he talk? Everything finished and done with. Everything——

He stood, therefore, stricken dumb, humble, waiting for reproof.

‘Are you ill, Checkley?’ asked Mr.

Dering. 'You look ill. What is the matter?'

'I am not ill,' he replied in a hollow voice, with a dismal shake of the head. 'I am not exactly ill. Yes, I am ill. I tried to put your table in order for you this morning, but I couldn't, I really couldn't. I feel as if I couldn't never do anything for you—never again. After sixty years' service, it's hard to feel like that.'

He moved to the table and began mechanically laying the papers straight.

'No one has touched your table but me for sixty years. It's hard to think that another hand will do this for you—and do it quite as well, you'll think. That's what we get for faithful service.' He put the papers all wrong, because his old eyes were dimmed with unaccustomed moisture. Checkley had long since ceased to weep over the sorrows of others, even in the most moving situations, when, for instance, he himself carried off the sticks instead of the rent. But no man is so

old that he cannot weep over his own misfortunes. Checkley's eye was therefore dimmed with the tear of Compassion, which is the sister of Charity.

‘I do not understand you this morning, Checkley. Have you had any unpleasantness with Mr. Austin—with any of the people?’

‘No—no. Only that I had better go before I am turned out. That's all. That's all’—he repeated the words in despair. ‘Nothing but that.’

‘Who is going to turn you out? What do you mean, Checkley? What the devil do you mean by going on like this? Am I not master here? Who can turn you out?’

‘You can, sir, and you will—and I'd rather, if you'll excuse the liberty, go out of my own accord. I'm a small man—only a very small man—but, thank God! I've got enough to give me a crust of bread and cheese to live upon.’

‘I tell you what, Checkley: you had better go home and lie down and rest a little.

You are upset. Now, at our age we can't afford to be upset. Go home, and be easy. Old friends don't part quite so easily as you think.' Mr. Dering spoke kindly and gently. One must be patient with so old a servant.

Checkley sobbed and choked. Like a child he sobbed. Like a child of four, Checkley choked and sniffed. 'You don't understand,' he said. 'Oh, no—you can't understand. It's what I saw last night.'

'This is very wonderful. What did you see? A ghost?'

'Worse than a ghost—who cares for a ghost? Ghosts can't turn a man out of his place and bring him to be a laughing-stock. No—no. It was a man that I saw, not a ghost.'

'If you can find it possible to talk reasonably'—Mr. Dering took his chair and tore open an envelope—'when you can find it possible to talk reasonably, I will listen. Meantime, I really think that you had better go home and lie down for an hour or two.'

Your nerves are shaken ; you hardly know what you are saying.'

'I was in Gray's Inn yesterday evening. By accident, at eight.' He spoke in gasps, watching his master curiously. 'By accident—not spying. No—by accident. On my way to my club—at the *Salutation*. Walking through South Square. Not thinking of anything. Looking about me—careless-like.'

'South Square, Gray's Inn. That is the place where the man Edmund Gray lives : the man we want to find and cannot find.'

'Oh ! Lord ! Lord !' exclaimed the clerk. 'Is it possible ?' He lifted his hand and raised his eyes to heaven and groaned. Then he resumed his narrative.

'Coming through the passage, I looked up to the windows of No. 22—Mr. Edmund Gray's Chambers, you know.'

'I believe so.' Mr. Dering's face betrayed no emotion at all. 'Go on ; I am told so.'

'In the window I saw Mr. Edmund Gray himself—himself.'

‘Curious. You have seen him—but why not?’

‘The man we’ve all been so anxious to find. The man who endorsed the cheque and wrote the letters and got the papers—there he was!’

‘Question of identity. How did you know him, since you had never seen him before?’

This question Checkley shirked.

‘He came down-stairs five minutes afterwards, while I was still looking up at the windows. Came down-stairs, and walked out of the Square—made as if he was going out by way of Raymond’s Buildings—much as if he might be going to Bedford Row.’

‘These details are unimportant. Again—how did you know him?’

‘I asked the Policeman who the gentleman was. He said it was Mr. Edmund Gray. I asked the newspaper boy at the Holborn entrance. He said it was Mr. Edmund Gray, and that everybody knew him.’

‘So everybody knows him. Well, Checkley, I see nothing so very remarkable about your seeing a man so well known in the Inn. It adds nothing to our knowledge. That he exists, we know already. What share, if any, he has had in this case of ours remains still a mystery. Unless, that is, you have found out something else.’

Checkley gazed upon his master with a kind of stupor. ‘No—no,’ he murmured. ‘I can’t.’

‘What did you do, when you found out that it was the man?’

‘Nothing.’

‘You did nothing. Well—under the circumstances I don’t know what you could have done.’

‘And he walked away.’

‘Oh! He walked away. Very important indeed.—But, Checkley, this story does not in the least account for your strange agitation this morning. Have you anything more to tell me? I see that you have, but you seem

to experience more than usual difficulty in getting it out.'

The clerk hesitated. 'Do you,' he asked at last—'do you—happen—to know Gray's Inn?'

'I daresay I have been there—years ago. Why?'

'Oh! you haven't been there lately, have you?'

'Not lately—not for forty years, or some such inconsiderable period. Why?'

'I thought you might yourself have met Mr. Edmund Gray—been to his chambers, perhaps.'

Mr. Dering sat upright and laid his hand upon his letters. 'Checkley,' he said, 'I am always willing to make allowance for people in mental distress, but I think I have made allowance enough. Come to the point. Have you lost any money?'

'No—no; not so bad as that—but bad enough. No, I couldn't afford to lose money. I haven't got enough to spare any. But I got

a shock—a kind of stroke—partly because of the man I met, and partly because of the person with him.’

‘Oh ! who was that ? Are we arriving at something ?’

‘I hadn’t told you that. The person who was sitting at the open window with him, who came down-stairs with him, and walked out of the Square with him, was no other than your own ward, Miss Elsie Arundel herself !’

‘Oh ! why not ?’ asked Mr. Dering carelessly. ‘She told me yesterday, was it ? that she knows him.’

‘If it had been any one else she was with,’ he replied, mixing up his grammar—‘if it had been any one else who was with her—I wouldn’t have been surprised ! But to see the two together. That gave me a turn that I can’t get over.’

‘Still—why not ? Miss Elsie Arundel has already told me that she is acquainted with Mr. Edmund Gray.’

‘What ? She has told you — she has

actually told you? Oh! what has she told you? Oh! Lord! Lord! What is a man to say or to do? She told you—what is best to do?’ He wrung his hands in his distress and his perplexity.

‘I cannot understand, Checkley,’ said Mr. Dering with emphasis, ‘the reason for this display of excitement. Why should she not tell me or anybody else? Do you suppose that my ward is doing anything clandestine? She has told me that she is acquainted with this man. She asserts further—that we have made a great mistake about him. What she means, I cannot understand. She says, in fact, that this gentleman is a perfectly honourable person. It is possible that he has deceived her. It is also possible that the name of Edmund Gray has been wrongfully used in the papers which belong to the case. Certainly it was an Edmund Gray who endorsed the first cheque; and an Edmund Gray having an address at 22 South Square whose name is connected with the later

business. Well, we shall see presently.—When do you take out the warrant for the arrest of this man? By the way, Elsie Arundel implores me not to allow that step. When are you going to do it?’

‘This morning, I was going to do it. Everything is ready—but’——

‘But what?’

‘I can’t do it now.’

‘The man is clean gone off his head.’

‘Leave it till to-morrow—only to-morrow, or Monday. Before then, something is certain to turn up. Oh! certain sure it is. Something must turn up.’

‘There is certainly something that you are keeping behind, Checkley. Well—wait till Monday. To-day is Saturday. He can’t do very much mischief between this and Monday.—That’s enough about Edmund Gray. Now, here is another point, to which I want a direct answer from you. My brother asserts, I believe on your authority, that Athelstan Arundel has been living in a low and profligate

manner in some London suburb, and that he was in rags and poverty early this year. What is your authority for this?’

‘Why, I heard him confess—or not deny—that he’d been living in Camberwell in bad company. It was at the *Salutation* I heard it. He didn’t see me. I’d got my head behind a paper. He never denied it.’

‘Humph!—And about the rags?’

‘I don’t know anything about the rags.’

‘Very likely there is as much foundation for the one charge as for the other. Three or four years ago, he was in America, to my knowledge. He wrote to me from America. I now learn, on the authority of his sister, that he only came back a month ago, and that he has been and is still in the service of an American paper. What have you got to say to that?’

‘Nothing. I don’t feel as if I could say anything. It’s all turned upsy down. That won’t do, I suppose, no more than the rest.’

‘But, my friend, if that is true, your theory

of conspiracy and confederacy, which you took so much pains to build up, falls to the ground as far as Athelstan is concerned.'

'Yes.—Oh! I haven't nothing to say.' It was a mark of the trouble which possessed him that his language reverted to that of his young days, before he had learned the art of correct speech from the copying of legal documents. He preserved the same attitude with bent head and hanging hands, a sad and pitiful object.

'Since Athelstan was not in London during the months of March and April, he could have had no hand in the later forgeries. And it is acknowledged that the same hand was concerned both in the earlier and the later business.'

'Yes—yes—the same hand. Oh! yes—the same hand,' he repeated with pathos unintelligible to his master. 'The same hand—the same hand; yes—yes—the same hand—that's the devil of it—same hand done it all.'

'Then what becomes of your charge

against my young Partner? You were extremely fierce about it. So was my brother. You had no proofs—nor had he. If the same hand was in both forgeries, it could not have been the hand of George Austin. What do you say to that?’

‘Nothing. I’m never going’—still standing hands hanging—‘to say anything again as long as I live.’

‘But you were very fierce about it, Checkley. You must either find more proofs or withdraw your accusation.’

‘Oh! if that’s all, I withdraw—I withdraw everything.’

‘Why did you bring that charge then, Checkley? You’ve been making yourself very busy over the character of my Partner. You have permitted yourself to say things in the office before the clerks about him. If it turns out that he has had nothing to do with the business, you will be in a very serious position.’

‘I withdraw—I withdraw everything,’ the

old clerk replied, but not meekly. He was prepared to withdraw, but only because he was forced.

‘Remember, too, that it was you who brought the charge against young Arundel.’

‘I withdraw—I withdraw everything.’

‘You went so far as to remember—the other day—having seen him replace the notes in the safe. What do you say to that?’

‘I withdraw.’

‘But it was a direct statement—the testimony of an eye-witness. Was it true or not?—I don’t know you this morning, Checkley. First, you appear shaking and trembling: then you tell me things which seem in no way to warrant so much agitation. Next, you withdraw an accusation which ought never to have been made except with the strongest proof. And now you wish to withdraw an alleged fact.’

Checkley shook his head helplessly.

‘I acknowledge that the business remains as mysterious as before. Nothing has been

found out. But there remains an evident and savage animosity on your part towards two young gentlemen in succession. Why? What have they done to you?’

Checkley made reply in bold words, but still standing with hanging hands: ‘I withdraw the animosity. I withdraw everything. As for young Arundel, he was a supercilious beast. We were dirt beneath his feet. The whole earth belonged to him. He used to imitate my ways of speaking, and he used to make the clerks laugh at me. I hated him then. I hate him still. It was fun to him that an old man nigh seventy, with no education, shouldn’t speak like a young gentleman of Oxford and Cambridge College. He used to stick his hat on the back of his head as if it was a crown, and he’d slam the door after him as if he was a Partner. I hated him. I was never so glad as when he ran away in a rage. He was coming between you and me, too—oh! I saw it. Cunning he was. Laying his lines for to come between you and me.’

‘Why—you were jealous, Checkley.’

‘I was glad when he ran away. And I always thought he’d done it, too. As for seeing him put the cheque back in the safe, I perceive now that I never did see him do it. Yet I seemed to think at the time that I’d remembered seeing him do a kind of a sort of a something like it. I now perceive that I was wrong. He never done it. He hadn’t the wits to contrive it. That sort is never half sharp. Too fine gentleman for such a trick.—Oh! I know what you are going to say next. How about the second young fellow? I hate him too. I hate him because he’s the same supercilious beast as the other, and because he’s been able to get round you. He’s carneyed you—no fool like an old fool—and flattered you—till you’ve made him a Partner. I’ve worked for you heart and soul for sixty years and more, and this boy comes in and cuts me out in a twelvemonth.’

‘Well! but Checkley—hang it!—I couldn’t make you a Partner.’

‘ You didn’t want no Partners. You could do your work, and I could do mine and yours too, even if you did want to go asleep of an afternoon.’

‘ This is grave, however. You hated Mr. Austin, and therefore you bring against him this foul charge. This is very grave, Checkley.’

‘ No—I thought he was guilty. I did, indeed. Everything pointed that way. And I don’t understand about young Arundel, because he came into the *Salutation* with the Cambridge gentleman who gets drunk there every night, and he said that he’d lived at Camberwell for eight years with bad company as I wouldn’t name to you, sir. I thought he was guilty. I did, indeed.’

‘ And now?’

‘ Oh! now it is all over. Everything’s upsy down. Nobody’s guilty. I know now that he hasn’t had anything to do with it. He’s a young man of very slow intelligence and inferior parts. He couldn’t have had any-

thing to do with it. We ought to have known that.'

'Well—but who has done it, after all?'

'That's it.' Checkley was so troubled that he dropped into a chair in the presence of his master. 'That's it. Who's done it? Don't you know who done it? No—I see you don't so much as suspect. No more don't I. Else—what to do—what to say—Lord only knows!' He turned and ran—he scuttled out of the room, banging the door behind him.

'He's mad,' said Mr. Dering. 'Poor man! Age makes some men forgetful, but it has driven Checkley mad.'

CHAPTER XXXI

THE THREE ACCOMPLICES

ON that same evening the three accomplices—probably on the proceeds of their iniquities—were dining together at the *Savoy*. After dinner they sat on the verandah overlooking the river and the embankment. 'Tis sweet, what time the evening shades prevail, while one is still in the stage of physical comfort and mental peace attendant upon an artistic little banquet, to view from the serene heights of a balcony at that hotel the unquiet figures of those who flit backwards and forwards below. They—alas!—have not dined so well, or they could not walk so fast, or drag their limbs so hopelessly, or lean over the wall so sadly.

Elsie leaned her head upon her hands,

looking down upon this scene, though not quite with these thoughts. Young ladies who are quite happy, and are going to be married next week, do not make these comparisons. Happiness is selfish. When one is quite happy, everybody else seems quite happy too—even Lazarus and the leper. We must never be happy if we do not wish to be selfish.

Coffee was on the table. Athelstan had a cigar. They were all three silent. During dinner they had talked gaily, because everybody knows that you cannot talk with strange people listening. After dinner they sat in silence, because it is only when the waiters are gone that one is free to talk.

‘Elsie,’ said George presently, ‘you have something to tell us—something you have discovered. For my own part, since I handed the case over to anybody else, I feel as if I were not interested in it. But still, one would like to know—just for curiosity’s sake—when Checkley is to be “run in.”’

‘Yes,’ said Elsie, ‘I must tell you. Perhaps I ought to have told you before. Yet there was a reason. Now—you will be greatly astonished, George.’

‘Before you begin, Elsie’—Athelstan removed his cigar—‘I must tell you that yesterday evening I, too, made a discovery—what the Americans call a pivotal discovery—a discovery that discovers everything. I should have told you last night, but you announced your communications for this evening, and I thought we would expose our discoveries at the same time.’

‘You have found out too!’ Elsie cried ‘I see by your face that you have. Well, Athelstan, so much the better. Now, tell your discovery first, and I will follow.’

‘It is this. I have discovered Edmund Gray. I have sat with him and discoursed with him, in Freddy Carstone’s Chambers. He came in, sat beside me, and conversed for more than an hour.’

‘Oh!’ said Elsie. ‘Then you know all—as much as I know.’

‘Observe,’ George interposed, ‘that I know nothing as yet.’

‘Wait a moment, George. Learn that I have myself known Mr. Edmund Gray for a fortnight. You will think, perhaps, that I ought to have told you before. Well—but there is a reason—besides, the way, to begin with, did not lie quite clear before me. Now the time has come when you should advise as to the best course to follow.’

‘You have certainly been more mysterious than any oracle, Elsie. Yet you will bear witness, if it comes to bearing witness, that I accepted your utterances and believed in them.’

‘You certainly did, George.—And now, Athelstan, tell him the whole.’

‘In one word then—Edmund Gray, the man we have been looking after so long, is none other than Edward Dering, of 12 New Square, Lincoln’s Inn, Solicitor.’

‘I don’t understand,’ said George, bewildered. ‘Say it all again.’

Athelstan repeated his words.

‘That is my discovery, too,’ said Elsie. ‘Now you know all, as you understand.’

‘But I don’t understand. How can one man be another man?’

‘I sat beside one man,’ Athelstan added, ‘for an hour and more; and lo! all the time he was another man.’

‘And still I am fogged. What does it mean?’

‘It means, George, what you would never suspect. The one man received me as a stranger. He knew nothing about me: he had never heard my name, even. Yet the other man knows me so well. It was very odd at first. I felt as if I was talking to a sleep-walker.’

‘Oh!’ cried George, ‘I know now. You have seen Mr. Dering in a kind of sleep-walking state—I too have seen him thus. But he said nothing.’

‘ You may call it sleep-walking if you like. But, George, there is another and a more scientific name for it. The old man is mad. He has fits of madness, during which he plays another part, under another name. Now, do you understand?’

‘ Yes—but—is it possible?’

‘ It is more than possible; it is an actual certainty. Wait. Let Elsie tell her story.’

Then Elsie began, with a little air of triumph, because it is not given to every young lady to find out what all the men have failed to find.

‘ Well—you see—I was always thinking over this business, and wondering why nothing was found out about it, and watching you look this way and that, and it occurred to me that the first thing of all was to find out this Mr. Edmund Gray and lay hands upon him. At first I thought I would just go and stand outside his door all day long and every day until he came. But that

seemed a waste of time. So I remembered how you found his door open, and went in and spoke to the laundress. I thought that I would do the same thing, and sit down there and wait until he should come. But I was afraid to sit in the rooms of a strange man all alone—no, I could not do it. So I just found out the old woman—the laundress—as you did, George, and I gave her money, and she told me that Mr. Gray was at his Chambers almost every Saturday afternoon. Very well; if anybody chose to wait for him all Saturday afternoon, he would certainly be found. So on Saturday afternoon I took a cab and drove to Holborn, and got to the place before his arrival. But again, as it was not quite nice to stand at an open doorway in a public Square, I thought I would wait on the stairs. So I mounted—the doors were all closed—nobody was left in the place at all—I thought I should be perfectly safe and undisturbed, when I heard the noise of footsteps overhead—a tramp, tramp, tramp

up and down, with every now and then a groan—like a hungry creature in a cage. This kept on for a long time, and frightened me horribly. I was still more frightened when a door overhead opened and shut and the footsteps came down-stairs. They belonged to a man—an elderly man—who seemed as much frightened at seeing me as I was at seeing him. He asked me whether I wanted any one ; and when I said I wanted Mr. Edmund Gray, he said that he was a friend of Mr. Gray's, and that, since I was a friend too, I might act for Edmund Gray and lend him some money. He looked desperately poor and horribly hungry and thin and shabby, the poor old man !'

'So you acted for Edmund Gray. That was old Langhorne. He is a barrister, who lives in the garret, and is horribly down on his luck.—Go on.'

'Poor Elsie !' said George. 'Think of her, all alone on the staircase !'

'When he was gone, there was no sound

at all. The place was perfectly quiet. The time passed so slowly—oh! so slowly. At last, however, I heard a step. It came up the stairs. Oh! my heart began to beat. Suppose it should be Mr. Edmund Gray. Suppose it was some other person. Suppose it was some horror of a man! But I had not long to wait, because Mr. Edmund Gray himself stood on the landing. He stared at me, rather surprised to find a young lady on the stairs, but he showed no sign of recognition whatever. I was a complete stranger to him.'

'And was the man Mr. Dering?'

'He was—Mr. Dering. There was just the least little change in him. He wore his coat open instead of buttoned. He had no gloves, his hat was not pulled over his eyes, and his face was somehow lighter and brighter than usual.'

'That is so,' said Athelstan. 'Exactly with these little changes he presented himself to me.'

‘Perhaps there is another man in the world exactly like him.’

‘Futile remark!—Go on, Elsie.’

‘Then I guessed in a moment what it meant. I stepped forward and asked him if he was Mr. Edmund Gray. And then I followed him into his rooms.—George, there is no manner of doubt whatever. Mr. Dering has periods, whether regular or not I cannot tell, when he loses himself and becomes in imagination another man. He is mad, if you like, but there is method in his madness. The other man is just himself turned inside out. Mr. Dering believes in the possible wickedness of everybody: the other man believes in the actual goodness of every man. Mr. Dering considers Property the only stable foundation of Society; the other man considers Property the root of all evil. Mr. Dering is hard and jealous: the other man is full of geniality and benevolence. Mr. Dering is Justice: the other man is Mercy.’

‘Very neatly put, Elsie. There is quite

an eighteenth-century balance about your sentences and sentiments. So far'—Athelstan contributed his confirmation—'so far as I could judge, nothing could be more true. I found my man the exact opposite of himself.'

'Can such a thing be possible? If I were to speak to him, would he not know me?'

'You forget, George. You have seen him in that condition, and he did not know you.'

'Nothing is more common'—Athelstan the Journalist began to draw upon the encyclopædic memory which belongs to his profession—'than such a forgetfulness of self. Have you ever been into a Lunatic Asylum? I have—for professional purposes. I have discoursed with the patients, and been instructed by the physicians. Half the time many of the patients are perfectly rational: during the other half they seem to assume another mind with other memories. It is not real possession, as the ancients called it, because they never show knowledge other

than what they have learned before. Thus, a sane man who cannot draw would never in insanity become an artist. So Mr. Dering, when he is mad, brings the same logical power and skill to bear upon a different set of maxims and opinions. Said a physician to me at this asylum of which I speak: "There are thousands of men and women, but especially men, who are mad every now and then, and don't know it. Most of the crimes are, I believe, committed in moments of madness. A young fellow steals money—it is because at the moment he is so mad that he even persuades himself that borrowing is not stealing: that he is only borrowing: that he can get it back, and put it back before it is found out. What is uncontrollable rage but sudden madness? There are the men who know that they are mad on some point or other, and cunningly hide it, and are never found out. And there are the men who are mad and don't know it. In their mad times they commit all kinds of extravagances and

follies, yet somehow they escape detection." So he talked ; and he told me of a man who was a lawyer in one town with a wife and family, and also a lawyer in another with a different wife and family. But one lawyer never found out the other ; and the thing was only discovered when the man got a paralytic stroke and died in a kind of bewilderment, because, when the time came for him to be the other man, he found himself lying in a strange bedroom with a strange family round him. I had long forgotten the asylum. I did the place for my paper three or four years ago, and scored by the description. Since last night I have been recalling my experience and applying it. You see there can never be any physical change. This is no Hyde and Jekyll business. Whatever happens must be conducted with the same body and the same mind. The same processes of mind in which the man is trained remain, but his madness requires a new setting.'

‘ One cannot understand,’ said Elsie.

‘No. But then one cannot understand everything. That’s the real beauty of this world: we are planted in the midst of things: we can give names to them—Adam began that way, didn’t he?—but we can’t understand any of them; and most people think that when we have given a name we have succeeded in understanding. Well, Elsie—we don’t understand. But we may find out something. I take it that the other man grew up by degrees in his brain, so that there is no solution in the continuity of thought and recollection. The Edmund Gray developed himself. He has been developed for nearly ten years, since he has occupied the same Chambers all the time.’

‘But about the forgeries?’ George sprang to his feet. ‘I declare,’ he cried, ‘that I had quite forgotten the real bearing on our case.’

‘Edmund Gray,’ said Elsie, ‘says that his own lawyer who manages his affairs is Edward Dering. If he were to write letters while

Edmund Gray, he would not impose upon Edward Dering.'

'He cannot write to two men,' said Athelstan. There must be a border-land between the waking and the dreaming, when the two spirits of Edmund Gray and Edward Dering contend for the mastery, or when they command each other—when Edmund Gray endorses cheques and Edward Dering writes letters and conducts transfers for his client—his double—himself.'

'I have seen him in such a state,' said George. 'At the time I never suspected anything but a passing trouble of mind, which caused him to be so wrapped up in his thoughts as not to be able to distinguish anything. He was then, I doubt not now, carrying out the instructions of Edmund Gray, or he was Edmund Gray acting for himself. Checkley whispered not to disturb him. He said that he had often seen him so.'

'I have never tried to understand,' said Elsie. 'But I saw that Edmund Gray was

Mr. Dering gone mad, and that he himself, and nobody else, was the perpetrator of all these forgeries; and I have been trying to discover the best way—the kindest way to him—the surest way for us, of getting the truth known.—George, this is the secret of my mysterious movements. This is why I have not given you a single evening for a whole fortnight. Every evening—both Sundays—I have spent with this dear old man. He is the most delightful—the most gentle—the most generous—old man that you ever saw. He is full of ideas—oh! quite full—and they carry you out of yourself, until you awake next morning to find that they are a dream. I have fallen in love with him. I have had the most charming fortnight—only one was always rather afraid that he might come to himself, which would be awkward.’

‘Well, Elsie, have you found a way?’

‘I think I have. First, I have discovered that when he is surrounded with things that remind him of Edmund Gray, he remains

Edmund Gray. Next, I have found out that I can, by talking to him even at his office, when he has his papers before him, turn him into Edmund Gray.'

'You are a witch, Elsie.'

'She is,' said George, looking at her in the foolish lover's way. 'You see what she has turned me into—a long time ago, and she has never turned me back again.'

'I have been thinking too,' said Athelstan. 'For our purposes, it would be enough to prove the identity of Edmund Gray and Edward Dering. That explains the resemblance of the handwriting and of the endorsement. My commissionaire's recollection of the man also identifies the cheque as drawn by himself for himself under another name. It explains the presence of the notes in the safe. It also shows that the long series of letters which passed between him and the broker were written by himself for himself. Here, however, is a difficulty. I can understand Edward Dering believing himself to be

Edmund Gray, because I have seen it. But I cannot understand Edward Dering believing himself to be the Solicitor to Edmund Gray and writing at his command.'

'But I have seen him in that condition,' said Elsie. 'It was while he was changing from one to the other. He sat like one who listens. I think that Edmund Gray was at his elbow speaking to him. I think I could make him write a letter by instruction from Edmund Gray. That he should believe himself acting for a client in writing to the broker is no more wonderful than that he should believe himself another man altogether.'

'Show me, if you can, the old man acting for an imaginary client. Meantime, I mentioned the point as a difficulty. Prove, however, to Mr. Dering and to the others concerned that he is Edmund Gray, and all is proved. And this we can do by a host of witnesses.'

'I want more than this, Athelstan,' said Elsie. 'It would still be open to the enemy

to declare that George, or you, or I, had made use of his madness for our own purposes. I want a history of the whole case written out by Edmund Gray himself—a thing that we can show to Mr. Dering and to everybody else. But I dread his discovery. Already he is suspicious and anxious. I sometimes think that he is half conscious of his condition. We must break it to him as gently as we can. But the shock may kill him. Yet there is no escape. If the forgeries were known only to ourselves, we might keep the discovery a secret; and only if necessary—but it would not be necessary—keep some sort of watch over him and warn the Bank. But Checkley has told the clerks and the people at the Bank, and there are ourselves to think of and my mother and Hilda.—No; we must let them all know.’

‘And if one may mention one’s self,’ said Athelstan, ‘my own little difficulty presses. Because, you see, I don’t know how long I may be kept here. Perhaps to-morrow I

might go on to St. Petersburg or to Peking. Before I go, Elsie, I confess that I should like my mother to understand that—that she was a little hasty—that is all.’

‘You are not going to St. Petersburg, brother.’ Elsie took his hand. ‘You are not going to leave us any more. You are going to stay. I have made another discovery.’

‘Pray, if one may ask’——

‘Oh! you may ask. I saw a letter to-day—Mr. Dering showed it to me. It was written from the States three or four years ago. It showed where you were at that time—and showed me more, Athelstan—it showed me how you lost the pile of money that you made over that silver mine—you remember, Athelstan?’

He made no reply.

‘Oh! do you think that I am going to accept this sacrifice?—George, you do not know. The donor of that great sum of money which Mr. Dering held for me—we have often wondered who it was—I have only found out

to-day—it was Athelstan. He gave me all he had—for such a trifling thing—only because I would not believe that he was a villain—all he had in the world—and went out again into the cold. He said he dropped his money down a gully or a grating on the prairie—some nonsense. And he sent it all to me, George.—What shall we do?’

‘Is this really true, Athelstan? Did you really give up all this money to Elsie?’

‘She says so.’

‘It is quite true, George. I saw the letter—Mr. Dering showed it to me—in which he sent that money home, and begged Mr. Dering to take care of it, and to give it to me on the day when I should be one-and-twenty. He cannot deny it. Look at him. He blushes—he is ashamed—he hangs his head—he blows tobacco-smoke about in clouds, hoping to hide his red cheeks. And he talks of going on to St. Petersburg, when we know this secret, and have got the money! What do you call this conduct, George?’

‘Athelstan—there is no word for it. But you must have it back. You must, and shall. There can be no discussion about it. And there is not another man in the world, I believe, who would have done it.’

‘Nonsense. I should only have lost it, if I had kept it,’ Athelstan replied after the Irish fashion.

‘You hear, Athelstan. It is yours. There can be no discussion. That’s what I like a man for. While we women are all talking and disputing, the man puts down his foot and says: “There can be no discussion.” Then we all stop, and the right thing is done. It is yours, brother; and you shall have it, and you shall stay at home with us always and always.’ She laid her hand upon his shoulder, and her arm round his neck, caressing him with hand and voice.

The man who had wandered alone for eight years was not accustomed to sisterly caresses. They moved him. The thing itself moved him.

‘All this belongs to another chapter,’ he said huskily. ‘We will talk of it afterwards, when the business in hand is despatched.’

‘Well, then—that is agreed. You are to have your money back: my mother is to take her suspicions back: Mr. Dering is to have his certificates back and his dividends: Checkley is to take his lies back: Sir Samuel is to have his charges back: George and I are going to have our peace of mind back. And we are all going to live happy ever afterwards.’

‘As for Wednesday now,’ said George. ‘It is not an unimportant day for us, you know.’

‘Everything is ready. On Sunday morning my mother is always at home before Church. I will see her then, and acquaint her with the news that the wedding will take place as originally proposed, at her house. This will astonish her very much, and she will become angry and polite and sarcastic. Then I shall tell her to prepare not only for a

wedding feast, but also for a great, a very great surprise. And I shall also inform her that I shall be given away by my brother. And then—then—if I know my mother aright, she will become silent. I shall do that to-morrow morning.—In the evening, George, you will get your best-man, and I will get your sisters, my bridesmaids, and we will come here, or go to Richmond or somewhere—and have dinner and a cheerful evening.—Am I arranging things properly?’

‘Quite properly. Pray go on.’

‘Sunday afternoon I have promised to spend with my master—Edmund Gray. He is going to read me a new Paper he has just finished, in which he shows that Property can be destroyed by a painless process—Athelstan, put all your money into your pocket and keep it there—in less than a twelvemonth, and with it all crime—all sweating, all injustice.—No, Athelstan, he is not mad. When he argues on this theme he is persuasive and eloquent. He convinces everybody. I shall hear him

out, and then I shall try to make him write down all that has happened. If we can only get such a confession, it would be better than anything else. But it may be difficult. He does not like being questioned about himself. If I do succeed—I don't know quite what I ought to do next. He must be told. Some time or other he must have the truth. I thought of asking all the people mentioned to meet at his office on Monday morning at noon when Mr. Dering is always himself. On Sunday I would not. He has to address his people on Sunday evening. Let him do so undisturbed. I will leave him in happiness that one night longer. But you two—you will be anxious. Come on Sunday evening—between eight and nine—to the Hall of Science. Then you will hear him and see me. And I will let you know how I have prospered.'

'Sunday evening,' said George. 'Monday comes next, then Tuesday, and before Wednesday, my Elsie, the character of these two

convicts has to be completely whitewashed, even to the satisfaction of Hilda herself. Are we not running it pretty close?’

‘Unbeliever! Doubter! I tell you that you shall be married with all your friends round you, and that Athelstan shall give me away. And you shall go away on your holiday with a quiet heart and nothing to trouble you. What a foolish boy not to be able to trust his bride even for such a simple thing as getting a confession out of a mad-man!’

‘Do you sport a crest, old man?’ asked Athelstan.

‘I believe there is some kind of a sort of a thing somewhere around. But crests are foolishness.’

‘Not always. Take a new one, George—a real one. Stamp it on your spoons and forks and in your books and on your carriage. Let it be simply the words, “Dux Femina Facti.”’

CHAPTER XXXII

ELSIE AND HER MOTHER

‘CAN you spare me a few minutes, mother?’

Mrs. Arundel looked up from the desk where she was writing a letter, and saw her daughter standing before her. She started and changed colour, but quickly recovered, and replied coldly: ‘I did not hear you come in, Elsie. What do you want with me?’

Outside, the bells were ringing for Church: it was a quarter to eleven: Mrs. Arundel was already dressed for Church. She was one of those who do not see any incongruity between Church and a heart full of animosities. She was bitter against her daughter, and hard towards her son, and she hated her son-in-law elect with all the powers of her passionate nature. But, my brothers, what an array of

bare benches should we see in every place of worship were those only admitted who came with hearts of charity and love!

‘Do you wish to keep me long, Elsie? If so, we will sit down. If not, I am ready for Church, and I do not like to arrive late. People in our position should show a good example.’

‘I do not think that I shall keep you very long. But if you sit down, you will be so much more comfortable.’

‘Comfort, Elsie, you have driven out of this house.’

‘I will bring it back with me, then. On Monday evening, mother, I am coming back.’

‘Oh! What do you mean, child? Has the blow really fallen? I heard that it was impending. Is the young man—is he—a prisoner?’

‘No, mother. You are quite mistaken. You have been mistaken all along. Yet I shall come back on Monday.’

‘Alone, then?’

‘I shall leave it to you whether I come back alone, or with the two men whom I most regard of all the world—my lover and my brother.’

‘You know my opinions, Elsie. There has been no change in them. There can be none.’

‘Wednesday is my wedding day.’

‘I am not interested in that event, Elsie. After your wedding with such a man, against the opinions, the wishes, the commands of all whom you are bound to respect, I can only say that you are no longer my daughter.’

‘Oh! How can you be so fixed in such a belief? Mother, let me make one more appeal to your better feelings. Throw off these suspicions. Believe me, they are baseless. There is not the shadow of a foundation for this ridiculous structure they have raised. Consider. It is now—how long?—three weeks since they brought this charge, and they have proved nothing—absolutely nothing. If you

would only be brought to see on what false assumptions the whole thing rests.'

'On solid foundations—hard facts—I want no more.'

'If I could prove to you that Athelstan was in America until a month ago.'

'Unhappy girl! He is deceiving you. He has been living for eight years in profligacy near London. Elsie, do not waste my time. It should be enough for me that my son-in-law, Sir Samuel Dering, a man of the clearest head and widest experience, is convinced that it is impossible to draw any other conclusions.'

'It is enough for me,' Elsie rejoined quickly, 'that my heart tells me that my brother and my lover cannot be such creatures.'

'You have something more to say, I suppose.' Mrs. Arundel buttoned her gloves. The clock was now at five minutes before eleven.

'Yes. If it is no use at all trying to appeal to'——

‘No use at all,’ Mrs. Arundel snapped. ‘I am not disposed for sentimental nonsense.’

‘I am sorry, because you will be sorry afterwards. Well, then, I have come to tell you that I have made all the preparations, with George’s assistance, for Wednesday.’

‘Oh!’

‘Yes. The wedding cake will be sent in on Tuesday. My own dress—white satin, of course, very beautiful—is finished and tried on. It will be sent in on Monday evening. The two bridesmaids’ dresses will also come on Monday. George has arranged at the Church. He has ordered the carriages and the bouquets and has got the ring. The presents you have already in the house. We shall be married at three. There will be a little gathering of the cousins after the wedding, and you will give them a little simple dinner in the evening, which will, I daresay, end with a little dance. George has also seen to the red cloth for the steps

and all that. Oh! And on Tuesday evening you will give a big dinner party to everybody.'

'Are you gone quite mad, Elsie?'

'Not mad at all, my dear mother. It is Sir Samuel who is mad, and has driven you and Hilda mad. Oh! everything will come off exactly as I tell you. Perhaps you don't believe it.'

'You are mad, Elsie. You are certainly mad.'

'No, my dear mother, I am not mad. Oh! it is so absurd, if it were not so serious. But we are determined, George and I, not to make this absurdity the cause of lasting bitterness. Therefore, my dear mother, I do not want to be married from my brother's lodgings, but from your house. You will come to my wedding, I prophesy, full of love—full of love'—her eyes filled with tears—
'for me and for George—and for Athelstan—full of love and of sorrow and of self-reproach. I am to be given away by my brother—you

will come, I say, with a heart full of love and of pity for him.'

Mrs. Arundel gazed at her stonily.

'Everybody will be there, and you will receive all your friends after the wedding. I have taken care of the invitations. Hilda will be there too, horribly ashamed of herself. It will be a lovely wedding; and we shall go away with such good wishes from yourself as you would not in your present state of mind believe possible. Go now to Church, my dear mother, prepared for a happy and a joyful day.'

'I sometimes believe, Elsie,' said Mrs. Arundel, more coldly still, 'that you have been deprived of your senses. So far from this, I shall not be present at your wedding. I will not interfere with your holding your marriage here, if you like; you may fill the house with your friends, if you please. I shall myself take shelter with my more dutiful daughter. I refuse to meet my unhappy son; I will not be a consenting

party to the tie which will entail a lifelong misery'——

‘My dear mother—you will do everything exactly as I have prophesied.—Now, do not say any more, because it will only make our reconciliation a little more difficult. I ought to go to Church on the Sunday before my wedding if any day in the week. If you would only recover your trust in my lover’s honour, I could go to Church with you and kneel beside you. But without that trust—— Oh! go, my dear mother. You will find my prophecy come true, word for word—believe me or not.’

Mrs. Arundel went to Church. During the service she felt strange prickings of foreboding and of compunction and of fear, anxiety, and hope, with a little sadness, caused by the communication and the assurances of her daughter. Even in such a case as this, the thinker of evil is sometimes depressed by the arrival of the prophet of good. When Mrs. Arundel came away from Church, she

became aware that she had not heard one single word of the sermon. Not that she wanted very much to hear the sermon, any more than the First or Second Lesson—all three being parts of the whole which every person of respectability must hear once a week. Only it was disquieting to come away after half an hour's discourse with the feeling that she did not remember a single syllable of it. She took her early dinner with the other daughter, to whom she communicated Elsie's remarkable conduct, and her prediction and her invitation. It was decided between them that her brain was affected—no doubt, only for a time—and that it was not expedient for them to interfere; that it was deplorable, but a part of what might have been expected; and that time would show. Meanwhile, Sir Samuel reported that it had been resolved to get a warrant for the arrest of the man Edmund Gray, who hitherto had eluded all attempts to find him.

‘He appears to be a real person,’ the

knight concluded—‘an elderly man, whose character, so far as we can learn, is good. It is, however, significant that nothing has been discovered concerning his profession or calling. That is mysterious. For my own part, I like to know how a man earns his daily bread. I have even consulted a person connected with the Police. Nothing is known or suspected about him. But we shall see as soon as he is before the magistrate.’

‘And Wednesday is so close! Oh! my dear Sir Samuel, hurry them up. Even at the last moment—even at the risk of a terrible scandal—if Elsie could be saved!’

‘Well,’ said Sir Samuel, ‘it is curious—I don’t understand it—we had arranged for the application for a warrant for Friday morning. Would you believe it? That old donkey Checkley won’t go for it—wants it put off—says he thinks it will be of no use. What with this young man Austin at first, and this old man Checkley next, we seem in a conspiracy to defeat the ends of justice. But to-

morrow I shall go myself to my brother. It is time this business was finished.'

'Yes—yes,' said Mrs. Arundel. 'And my dear Sir Samuel, before Wednesday—let it be before Wednesday, I implore you, for all our sakes!'

'My dear Madam, it shall be to-morrow.'

At noon, Elsie returned to Half Moon Street, where George was waiting for her.

'I have made one more attempt,' she said, with tears; 'but it was useless. Her heart is as hard about you as ever it was about Athelstan. It is wonderful that she should have so little faith. I suppose it comes of going into the City and trying to make money. Edmund Gray would say so. I would have told her all, but for the old man's sake. He knows nothing: he suspects nothing; and I want to make the case so complete that there shall be no doubt—none whatever—possible in the minds of the most suspicious. Even Checkley must be satisfied. I shall finish the

work, I hope, this afternoon—Oh ! George—is it possible ? Is our wedding day next Wednesday—actually next Wednesday ? And the hateful cloud shall be blown away, and—and—and '——

For the rest of this chapter look into the book of holy kisses, where you will very likely find it.

CHAPTER XXXIII

PLENARY CONFESSION

EARLY on Sunday afternoon Elsie started upon her mission. She was anxious, because she was entering upon a most important business, and one requiring the greatest delicacy in the handling. It was enough—more than enough—that her witnesses should be able, one after the other, to identify Mr. Dering with Mr. Edmund Gray: but how much more would her hands be strengthened if she could produce a full and complete narrative of the whole affair, written by the hand which had done it all? To get that narrative was her business with the Master that afternoon. But she was hopeful, partly because she knew her power over the philosopher; and partly because, like every woman who

respects herself, she had always been accustomed to get exactly what she wanted, either by asking, coaxing, flattering, or taking.

The Master was waiting for her—one should never keep a Master waiting—and she was a little late: he was impatient: he had so much to talk about and to teach: one point suggested another in his mind: so much to say: he grudged the least delay: he walked about the room chafing because the hour appointed was already five minutes in the past: he would scold her: she must really learn to be punctual: they had only about five short hours before them for all he had to say. Was this the zeal of a student? But at that point she opened the door and ran in, breathless, smiling, eager, holding out both her hands, a dainty delicate maiden all his own—his disciple—his daughter—the daughter of the New Humanity—and he forgot his irritation, and took her hands in his and kissed her forehead. ‘Child,’ he sighed, ‘you are late. But never mind.

You are here. Why, you have grown so precious to me that I cannot bear you to be a minute late. It is such a happiness—such a joy in the present—such a promise for the future—that I have such a disciple! Now sit down—take off your bonnet. I have put a chair for you at the window—and a table for you to write. Here is your note-book.—Now—you have thought over what I taught you last?—That is well. Let us resume at the point where we left off—the rise of the co-operative spirit, which is the rise of the New Humanity.'

He talked for two hours—two long eloquent hours: he walked about the room: or he stopped before his disciple emphasising with the forefinger of admonition—repeating—illustrating by anecdote and memory—he had a prodigious memory. The Scholar listened intelligently. Sometimes she asked a question: sometimes she made notes. You must not think that she was a sham scholar; her interest in the Master's system was not

simulated. Above all things, she loved to hear this enthusiast talk—who would not love to hear of the New Jerusalem? Always he made her heart to glow with the Vision that he conjured up before her eyes of a world where there should be no more sorrow nor crying nor any more pain, nor any of the former things. He made her actually see—what others only read of—the Foursquare City itself with its gates open night and day, its jasper walls, and its twelve foundations of precious stones.—‘Why,’ he said, ‘the gates are open night and day because there is no Property to defend; and the walls are of jasper because it is the most beautiful of minerals, and because it can be polished like a mirror, so that the country around is reflected on its surface, which shows that it all belongs to the City; and the precious stones are the twelve cardinal virtues of Humanity, on which the order of the future shall rest—namely, Faith, Brotherly Love, Obedience, Patience, Loyalty, Constancy, Chastity, Courage, Hope, Simplicity, Tender-

ness, and Industry. It is an allegory—the whole book is an allegory—of Humanity.’ And she saw, beside the City, the river of life with the tree of life for the healing of all nations.

Then she clean forgot the purpose for which she had come : she was carried away : her heart beat—her cheek glowed. Oh ! Lovely Vision ! Oh ! Great and glorious Prophet ! He made a Heaven, and placed it on this earth. Now the mind of man can conceive of no other happiness but that which humanity can make out of the actual materials found upon this earthly ball. The Heaven, even of the most spiritual, is a glorified world ; the Hell, even of the most gentle, is a world of fleshly pain : no other Heaven attracts : no other Hell terrifies : there is no promise, or hope, or prospect, or inheritance that man desires or poet can feign or visionary can preach but an earthly Heaven : it must be a Heaven containing sunshine and shower, kindly fruits in due season, love and joy and

music and art, and men and women who love each other and labour for each other. Such a world—such a New Jerusalem—the Master drew every day ; he loved it, and lingered over it ; he painted over and over again this splendid Vision. He was never tired of painting it, or his hearers of gazing upon it. But to-day he spoke with greater fulness, more clearly, more brilliantly, more joyously than ever. Was the Prophet really a man of seventy years and more? For his mind was young—the enthusiast, like the poet, never grows old. His voice might have been the voice of a boy—a marvellous boy—a Shelley—preaching the glories of the world when Property should be no more.

He ceased. And the Vision which he had raised quickly faded away. They were back again in the dingy old Inn ; they were among the solicitors and the money-lenders and the young fellows who have their Chambers in the place. The Inn is about as far from the

New Jerusalem as any place under the sun ; it is made over bodily and belongs—every stair—every chamber—to the interests of Property.

He ceased his prophecy, and began to argue, to reason, to chop logic, which was not by any means so interesting. At last he stopped this as well. ‘You have now, dear child,’ he said, ‘heard quite as much as you can profitably absorb. I have noticed for the last two or three minutes your eyes wandering and your attention wearied. Let us stop—only remember what I have just said about the diseases of the Body Politic. They are akin to those that affect the human body. By comparing the two we may learn not only cause, but also effect. We have our rheumatisms, gouts, asthmas, neuralgias, colds and coughs, fevers and other ills. So has the Body Politic. Whence come our diseases? From the ignorance, the follies, the vices, the greed and gluttony of our forefathers. So those of the Body Politic. Take away

Property and you destroy greed. With that, half the diseases vanish.'

Elsie heard and inclined her head. It did occur to her that perhaps Property in the Body Politic might be represented by food in the Body Human, but she forbore. The Master was one who did not invite argument. Nearly all the great Teachers of the world, if you think of it, have conveyed their wisdom in maxims and aphorisms.

He took out his watch. 'It is nearly four,' he said. 'Shall we go on to the Hall?'

'Not yet. There is no need for us to be there before six. We have two good hours before us. Let us use them more pleasantly than in sitting alone in the Hall—you must own that it is stuffy. We will talk about other things—about ourselves—not about me, because I am quite an insignificant person, but about you, dear Master.' She was now about to enter upon her plan of duplicity. She felt horribly ashamed, but it had to be done.

She strengthened herself: she resolved: she suppressed the voice of conscience.

‘About me?’ asked the Master. ‘But what is there to talk about?’

‘Oh! there is ever so much.’ She took his right hand in her own and held it, knowing that this little caress pleased and moved him. ‘Master—what a wonderful chance it was that brought me here! I can never sufficiently wonder at it. I have told George—George Austin—my lover, you know: and Athelstan—he is my brother.’ She looked at him sharply, but there was no sign of recognition of those two names. Edmund Gray had never heard of either. ‘I have told them about you and of your great work, and how you are teaching me and everything. But when they ask me who you are, where you have lived, and all about you, I can tell them nothing. Oh! I know it matters nothing about me and my own friends; but, my dear Master, we have to think of the future. When the Cause has spread, and spread, and spread, till it covers

the whole world, people will want to know all about the man who first preached its principles. Who will be able to tell them? No one. You are alone; you have no wife or children. Your name will remain for ever attached to the Cause itself. But you—you—the man—what will you be? Nothing. Nothing but a name. You ought to write an autobiography.'

'I have sometimes thought I would do so'—his face became troubled; 'but—but'—

'But you are always occupied with working for the world. You have no time, of course. I quite understand that; and it worries you—does it not?—to be called upon to turn your thoughts from the present back to the past.'

'Yes—yes; it does—it does. Elsie, you exactly express the difficulty.'

'And yet—you must own—you must confess—it is natural for the world to want to know all about you. Who was the great Edmund Gray? Why, they will want to know every particular—every single parti-

cular : where you were born—where you were educated—who were your masters—what led you to the study of Humanity and its problems—where you lived ; if you were married and to whom—what you read—who were your friends. Oh ! there is no end to the curiosity of the world about their great men.’

‘Perhaps.’ He rose and looked out of the window. When men are greatly pleased they must always be moving. ‘I confess that I have never thought of these things at all. Yet, to be sure—you are right.’ He murmured and purred.

‘No, but I have thought of them, ever since I had the happiness of being received by you. Master, will you trust me ? Shall I become your biographer ? You cannot find one more loving. You have only to give me the materials. Now—let me ask you a few questions just for a beginning—just to show you the kind of thing I shall want to know.’

He laughed and sat down again. ‘Why, my life has not got in it one single solitary

incident, or episode, or adventure. There are no misfortunes in it. There is not such a thing as a disease in it. I have always been perfectly well. There is not even a love episode or a flirtation in it. There are not even any religious difficulties in it. Without love, ill-health, misfortune, religious doubts—where is the interest in the life, and what is there to tell?’

‘Well, a life that has no incident in it must be the life of a student. It is only a student who never falls in love.’

‘Or,’ said the Philosopher, ‘a money-getter.’

‘Happily, there are not many students or we women should be disconsolate indeed. Do you know, Master, that you can only be excused such a dreadful omission in your history by that one plea? Sit down again, Master,’ for again he was walking about restlessly, partly disturbed by her questions, and partly flattered and pleased by her reasons. She opened her note-book and began to ask

questions about himself—very simple questions, such as would not introduce any disturbing points. He answered readily, and she observed with interest that he gave correctly the facts of his own—Edward Dering's—history.

He was born, he said, in that class which upholds Property—the Better Class—meaning the Richer. His father was a wealthy solicitor, who lived in Bedford Row. He was born in the year 1815—Waterloo year. He was the eldest of a family of five—three daughters and two sons. He was educated at Westminster. On leaving school, his father offered him the advantage of a University course, but he refused, being anxious to begin as early as possible his life's work—as he thought—in the defence of Property. He was therefore articled to his father; and at the age of twenty-two he passed his examination and was admitted.

‘And then you were young—you were not yet a student—you went into society.

You saw girls and danced with them. Yet you never fell in love, and were never married. How strange! I thought everybody wanted love. A man's real life only begins, I have always been taught, with love and marriage. Love means everything.'

'To you, my child, no doubt it does. Such as you are born for love,' he added gallantly. 'Venus herself smiles in your eyes and sits upon your lips. But as for me I was always studious more or less, though I did not for long find out my true line. I worked hard—I went out very little. I was cold by nature, perhaps. I had no time to think about such things. Now, when it is too late, I regret the loss of the experience. Doubtless if I had that experience I should have gained greatly in the power of persuasion. I should have a much more potent influence over the women among my hearers. If I were a married man I should be much more in sympathy with them.'

'No—n—no.' Elsie hesitated a little.

‘Perhaps women—especially the younger kind—get on better with unmarried men. However, you were not married.’

‘At first, then, I was a solicitor with my father. Then—presently’—— His face put on the troubled look again.

‘You continued,’ Elsie interrupted quickly, ‘to work at your profession, though you took up other studies.’

‘No—no—not quite that.’

‘You began to take up Social problems, and gradually abandoned your profession.’

‘No—no—not that either—quite.’

‘You found you could not reconcile your conscience any longer to defending Property.’

‘No—I forget exactly. It is strange that one should forget a thing so simple. I am growing old, I suppose.—Well—it matters not. I left the profession. That is the only important thing to remember. That I did so these Chambers prove. I came out of it. Yes, that was it. Just at the moment, my head being full of other things, I cannot

remember the exact time, or the manner of my leaving the profession. I forget the circumstances, probably because I attached so little importance to it. The real point is that I came out of it and gave myself up to these studies.'

She noted this important point carefully and looked up for more.

'There, my dear child, is my whole life for you. Without an incident or an episode. I was born : I went to school : I became a solicitor : I gave up my profession : I studied social economy : I made my great discovery : I preached it. Then—did I say my life was without an episode and without love? No—no—I was wrong. My daughter—I have at last found love and a child—and a disciple. What more have I to ask?'

'My Master!' No daughter could be more in sympathy with him than this girl.

'It is all most valuable and interesting,' she said, 'though the facts are so few. Books will be written, in the future, on these facts,

which will be filled out with conjecture and inference. Even the things that you think of so little importance will be made the subject of comment and criticism. Well—but my Biography of you will be the first and best and most important. I shall first make a skeleton life out of the facts, and then fill in the flesh and blood and put on the clothes, and present you, dear Master, just as you are.’

‘ Ask me what you will, but not too often. It worries me to remember the past. My dear, I am like a man who has made himself—who has risen from the gutter. He cannot deny the fact, but he doesn’t like to be talking about it; and he is insulted if any one charges him with the fact or alludes to it in any way in his presence. That is my case exactly. I have made myself. I have raised myself from the gutter—the gutter of Property. I actually worked in defence of Property till I was sixty years old and more. Now I am rather ashamed of that fact. I do not deny

it—you must put it into your Biography—but I do not like talking about it.’

‘You were once a solicitor, and you are now a Prophet. What a leap! What a wonderful leap! I quite understand. Yet sometimes, now and then, for the sake of the curious impertinent world, look back and tell me what you see.’

‘I suppose it is because I am so absorbed in my work that it is difficult for me to remember things. Why, Elsie, day after day, from morning to evening, I sit here at work. And in the evening I remember nothing of the flight of time. The hours strike, but I hear them not. Only the books on the table show what has been my occupation. And you want me to go back, not to yesterday, but ten, twenty, thirty years ago. My dear child, I cannot. Some of the past is clear to me—a day here and there I remember clearly—all my evenings at the Hall of Science: my lessons with you; those I remember. But to recall days passed in meditation and absorbing

study is not possible. No—no—I cannot even try.'

He spoke with a little distress, as if the very thought of the necessary effort troubled him.

'Believe me, my dear Master,' said Elsie, 'I would not vex you. Only for some of the things which you do remember. For instance, the world always wants to know about the private fortunes of its great men. Your own affairs, you told me once, are in the hands of a—Mr.—Mr.—what is his name?'

'Dering—Dering. A very well known solicitor. His office is in New Square, Lincoln's Inn—he manages my money matters. I am, I believe, what the world calls wealthy.'

'That gives you independence and the power of working for Humanity, does it not?'

'It does,' said the Scourge and Destroyer of Property, unconscious of the incongruity. 'Dering, my solicitor, is, I believe, a very honest man. Narrow in his views—wedded to the old school—quite unable to see the

advance of the tide. But trustworthy. He belongs to a tribe which is indispensable so long as Property is suffered to exist.'

'Yes—only so long. Property and lawyers will go out hand in hand.'

'And magistrates,' he added with enthusiasm. 'And Courts of Justice and prisons. And criminals, because the chief incentive to crime will be destroyed. What a glorious world without a law, or a lawyer, or a policeman!'

'Mr. Dering, is it? Why, my dear Master, I know something about Mr. Dering. My brother Athelstan was articled to him. He became a managing clerk for him. Then there was trouble about a cheque. Something was wrong about it. He was unjustly blamed or suspected, and he left the House. I wonder, now, whether you could throw any light upon that business of the cheque?'

'I, my dear child? A single solitary cheque at a lawyer's office? How should I possibly know anything about it?'

'Oh! but you might remember this

cheque, because, now I think of it, your own name was connected with it. Yes—it was. I am certain it was. The cheque was drawn in March in the year 1882—a cheque for seven hundred and twenty pounds, payable to your order—the order of Edmund Gray.’

‘A cheque for seven hundred and twenty pounds? In March 1882? That must have been: yes—yes—that was about the time. Now, this is really most remarkable, child, most remarkable that you should actually hit upon a cheque—one of thousands issued from that office—which I should remember perfectly. Life is full of coincidences—one is always hearing odd things said, meeting faces which one knows.—Well, it is most remarkable, because I received a cheque for that very amount at that very time from Dering. Oh! I remember perfectly. It was when I had a scheme—I thought it then, being younger than I am now—a very good scheme indeed. It was intended for the gradual destruction of Property. I did not understand

at that time so fully as I do now the rising of the tide and the direction of the current which is steadily advancing to overwhelm Property without any feeble efforts on my part. Yet my scheme was good so far as it went, and it might have been started with good effect, but for the apathy of the workers. You see, they were not educated up to it. I had already begun upon my scheme by advancing to certain working men sums which should make them independent of their employers until they should have produced enough to sell directly, without the aid of an employer, at their own co-operative stores. Unfortunately, most of them drank the money ; the few who used it properly, instead of backing up their fellow-workmen, became themselves employers, and are now wealthy. Well, I thought I would extend this method. I thought that if I got together a chosen band—say, of seventy or so—and if, after teaching them and educating them a bit, I gave them, say, ten pounds apiece, to tide them

over the first few weeks, that I might next open a distributive and co-operative store for them, and so take the first step to abolishing the middle-man—the man of trade.’

‘I see; and so you drew the money for that purpose?’

‘Yes. But as I told you, I was obliged to abandon my scheme. The men were not sufficiently advanced. They listened; they professed great willingness to receive the money; but they gave me no encouragement to hope that they would carry out my plan. So it fell through. And the men remain to this day with their employers. And so—you see—I never used the money. I remember that I had the cheque cashed in ten-pound notes for the purpose.’

‘What became of the notes?’

‘I don’t know. They are in the Bank, I suppose—wandering about the world. I gave them back to Dering.’

‘Oh! my dear Master’—Elsie sprang to her feet and laid a sheet of paper on the

table—‘this is most Providential! I cannot tell you what a dreadful cause of trouble this cheque has been to us. It has half ruined my brother’s life. For Heaven’s sake, write it all down for me. Quick! quick! before you forget it all.’

‘I shall not forget it. Nevertheless, Elsie, if a statement of the facts can be of any use to you’—he changed his seat and took up the pen—‘certainly I will write it for you.’

‘I am requested,’ he wrote, ‘by Miss Elsie Arundel, my Scholar, to state what I know of a certain transaction which took place in March 1882. The facts are as follows: I had need of a sum of seven hundred and twenty pounds. For certain purposes I wanted it in ten-pound notes. I asked my agent, Mr. Dering, to give me a cheque; and as I thought that I should want the money immediately, perhaps in an hour or so, I asked him to make it payable to my order, and not to cross the cheque. He drew the cheque and gave it to me in his office. I then went to the

hotel where I was stopping—a place in Arundel Street, Strand, and sent a commissionnaire to the Bank for the money. He brought it, as I had requested, in ten-pound notes. In a few days I discovered that my plan could not be even commenced without the greatest danger of defeating its own object. I therefore took the notes to Mr. Dering's office and placed them in his safe. I suppose that he has long since returned them to the Bank.'

'There, child,' he said, reading this statement aloud. 'That is what I recollect about this matter.'

'Sign it.' Elsie gave him the pen again. 'Sign it, dear Master.—Oh! thanks—thanks a thousand times! You don't know—oh! you will never know or understand—I hope—how precious this document will be for me'—she folded the paper in an envelope and placed it in her handbag—'and for my people—my brother and all. Oh! my dear Master.' She stooped and kissed his hand, to hide the tears in her eyes. Athelstan's name was safe

now whatever happened. He would be completely cleared at last.

‘Why, my dear Scholar—my dear daughter.’ Mr. Edmund Gray was moved himself almost to tears at this unexpected burst of feeling. ‘As if there was anything I would not do for you if I could. I, who have never loved any woman before, love one now. She is my daughter—my grandchild.—So your brother will be helped by this little reminiscence—will he? Actually, your brother! I wonder if there is anything more that I could remember for you in this uneventful life of mine.’

‘Oh no!—that would be too much to hope. Yet there is a chance—just a chance. I wonder if I may tell you. There is still time before us. If we are at the Hall by six we shall do very well. It is no more than half-past four. Shall I tell you the trouble? Oh! But it is a shame. And you with this great work laid upon you! No—no—I must not.’ Oh! Delilah! oh! Circe! for she looked as if,

in spite of her unwilling words, she wanted to tell it very badly indeed.

‘Nay, my dear. You must, and you shall.—What? You are in trouble, and you will not tell me what it is. You—my Scholar—my clear-eyed disciple, who can see what these dull creatures of clay around us can never understand—you are in trouble, and you hesitate to tell me?—Fie! fie! Speak now. Tell me all.’

‘I have told you that I have a lover, and that I am engaged to be married.’

‘Yes—yes. His name, too, you have told me. It is George—George Austin. There were Austins once—I seem to remember—but that does not matter.’

‘We are to be married on Wednesday.’

‘So soon? But you have promised that I shall not lose my pupil.’

‘No, dear Master. As soon as we come back from our holiday, I will come and see you again and learn of you. Do not doubt that. I can never again let you go out of my

life. I shall bring my—my husband with me.'

'If I thought your marriage would take you away from me, I should be the most unhappy of men. But I will spare you for a month—two months—as long as you please. Now, tell me what is on your mind.'

'George was one of Mr. Dering's managing clerks—your Mr. Dering, you know.'—Mr. Edmund Gray nodded gravely.—'He had no money when we were engaged, and we thought that we were going to be quite a poor and humble pair. But a great piece of good fortune happened to him, for Mr. Dering made him a Partner.'

'Did he? Very lucky for your friend. But I always thought that Dering ought to have a Partner. At his age it was only prudent—necessary, even.'

'So we were made very happy; and I thought we were the luckiest couple in the world. But just then there was a discovery made at the office—a very singular discovery

—I hardly know how to describe it, because it is not quite clear to me even yet. It was concerned with the buying or selling or transfer of certain stocks and shares and coupons and that kind of thing. Mr. Dering seems not to remember having signed the papers concerned. There is a fear that they are in wrong hands. There is a suspicion of forgery even. I am ashamed even to mention such a thing to you, but my lover's name has been connected with the business; and Dering's clerk, Checkley—you know Checkley?'—

‘Certainly—Dering's old servant.’

‘Has openly charged George—on no evidence, to be sure—of having forged the letters or of having assisted in the forgery.’

‘This is very serious.’

‘It is very serious; but we do not intend to let the thing interfere with our wedding. Only, unless I can remove the last ray of suspicion before Wednesday, we shall spend our honeymoon at home, in order to watch the case from day to day.’

‘Buying or selling stocks? Dering would be constantly doing that.’

‘It appears that these transactions were the only things of the kind that he has done this year. That is to say, he denies having done these.’

‘Well—as for these having been the only transactions of the kind, he managed a good bit of such business for me this last spring.’

‘Did he? Do you remember the details of that business?’

‘Clearly. It was only yesterday, so to speak.’

‘Was it the purchase or transfer of stock or shares?’

‘Certainly. To a very large amount. I have told you about my Industrial Village, have I not? The Village where all are to be equal—all are to work for a certain time every day, and no longer—all are to be paid in rations and clothes and houses, and there is to be no private property—my Ideal Village.’

‘I know. A lovely Village.’

‘It was early in the spring that I finished my designs for it. Then it occurred to me that it would be well if, instead of always going to my lawyer for money, I had a large sum at my command lying at my bank. So I instructed Dering to transfer to my name a great quantity of stocks lying in his name. He was a trustee or a—well—it is rather unusual, but I like having all my business affairs managed for me, and—— But this will not interest you’—this with the look of irritation or bewilderment which sometimes passed over his face. ‘The important thing is that it was done, and that my Bank received those transfers, and has instructions to receive the dividends.’

‘Oh! And has all the papers, I suppose?’

‘It had them. But I thought that perhaps my old friend might think it looked like want of confidence if I left them there, so I sent for them, and took them to his office. They are now in the safe. I put them there

myself with my own hand ; or he did with his own hand—I forget. Sometimes—it is very odd—when I think of things done at that office, I seem to have done it myself ; and sometimes I think that he did it. Not that it matters.’

‘Not at all. The papers are actually in the safe again?’

‘Certainly. I—that is—he—he or I—put them there.’

‘Oh ! my dear Master’—Elsie clapped her hands—‘this is even more important than the other. You do not know—you cannot guess—what mischiefs you are able to stop. If I had only been able to talk to you about these things before ! The paper you have already written is for my brother. Now sit down, my Master, and write another that will do for me.’

‘I will do anything you ask me—and everything. But as for this, why not ask Dering ? His memory never fails. His mind is like a box which holds everything and can never be filled. Perhaps he would not like

these private affairs—as between solicitor and client—to be talked about.’

‘We cannot go to Mr. Dering. There are certain reasons which would not interest you. All we want is a clear, straightforward statement, an exact statement of what happened. Sit down now and write me a full account of each transaction.’

‘Certainly ; if it will be of the least use to you.’

‘Early in the present year,’ he began, ‘I found that my plan of an Industrial Village if it was to be carried into effect would want all the money I could command. It occurred to me that it would be well to transfer a certain sum from the hands of my agent, and to place it in my own Bank ready to hand. I began then, in March, with a sum of six thousand pounds, which Dering, by my instructions, handed over to my Bank in the form of shares and stocks. I believe they were transfers of certain stocks held by him in his own name, but forming part of my fortune—my large

private fortune. The Bank was instructed to receive the dividends on that sum. A month or so later I obtained from Dering other stock to the value of twelve thousand pounds, the papers of which were also given to my Bank. And after that I took out papers representing twenty thousand pounds ; so that I had in my hands, ready to be sold out and used at a moment's notice, no less than thirty-eight thousand pounds. All this money I intended to devote to my Industrial Village. The scheme is still one in which I put my whole confidence. But it has not yet been carried into effect, in consequence of the difficulty of finding working men equal to the situation. They understand working for the man who has the money ; they do not understand working for the man who has none, that is for each other and for themselves. For my own part I could only find working men of that stamp. Perhaps I am too much in the study. I do not go about enough among working men. There must be some advanced to my

stage of development.—Well, for want of men, I could not start my Village, and I have not used the money. As for the papers, I have taken them out of the Bank and placed them in Dering's safe.'

Elsie looked over his shoulder, reading every word. 'The letters which Mr. Dering wrote to the stockbroker in accordance with your instructions. They were written for him—perhaps—by you. It is unusual, but'——

'I told you,' he replied sharply. 'What is the use of saying things twice? There are some things which confuse a man. I wrote them—he wrote them—he acted for me—or I acted for myself. What matter? The end is as I have written down for you.—Now, will this paper be of any use to you?'

'Of the greatest use. Please sign it, dear Master.'

He obeyed, and signed 'Edmund Gray.'

'There is one thing more.' Elsie saw in his face signs of disquiet, and hastened on. 'You have got your Bank book here?'

‘Yes. The Manager sent it here with an impertinent note about references, which I have sent on to Dering.—What do you want with the Bank book? It is in one of those drawers. See—here it is—cheque book too.’

‘If I were you, Master, I would have no more trouble about the money. You have given Mr. Dering the transfers and papers—why not give him back the money as well? Do not be bothered with money matters. It is of all things important to you to be free from all kinds of business and money matters. Who ever heard of a Prophet drawing a cheque? You sit here and work and meditate. You go to the Hall of Science and teach. It is the business of your friends to see that all your necessities are properly supplied.—Now, if you will in these minor matters suffer your friends to advise’——

‘Surely. I ask for nothing else.’

‘Then, dear Master, here is your cheque book and here your Bank book. Draw a cheque payable to the order of Edward Dering

for all the money that is lying here—I see it is seven hundred and twenty-three pounds five shillings and threepence.—I will take care of the cheque—so.—Oh! you have signed Edward Dering—careless Master! Draw another—now sign it Edmund Gray.—That will do.—And you had better at the same time write a letter to the Bank asking the Manager in future to receive the dividends for the account of Mr. Dering. I will write the letter, and you shall sign it. Now—no—no—not Edward Dering—Edmund Gray. Your thoughts are wandering.—There!—Now, dear Master, you are free from everything that might trouble you.'

The Master pushed back the blotting-pad with impatience, and rose from the chair. Elsie took possession of the signed cheques, the cheque book, the Bank book, and the letter. She had all—the statement in Edmund Gray's own handwriting—all—all—that was wanted to clear up the business from the beginning to the end. She put everything

together in her handbag. She glanced at her companion: she perceived that his face was troubled. 'I wish,' he said fretfully, 'that you had not worried me with those questions about the past. They disturb me. The current of my thoughts is checked. I am full of Dering and his office and his safe—his safe—and all'——

Elsie trembled. His face was changing—in a minute he would have returned to Mr. Dering, and she would have had to explain. 'Master,' she cried, laying her hand upon his arm, 'think. We are going to the Hall of Science—your Hall of Science—yours. The people are waiting for their Prophet. You are to address them. To-night you must surpass yourself, because there are strangers coming. Tell us—once again—all over again—of that world where there is no crime, no suffering, no iniquity, no sin, no sorrow—where there are no poor creatures deprived by a cruel social order of liberty, of leisure, of comfort, of virtue, of everything—poor

wretches born only to toil and to endure. Think of them. Speak for them. Plan for them. Make our hearts burn within us for shame and rage. Oh, Master '—for his face was troubled still and doubtful, as if he was hovering on the border-land between himself and his other self—'no one can speak to them like you ; no one has your power of speech : make them feel that new world—make them see it—actually see it with their earthly eyes—make them feel it in their hearts.'

'Child'—he sighed ; his face fell back into repose—'you comfort me. I was falling—before you came to me I often used to fall—into a fit of gloom—I don't know why. Something irritates me ; something jars ; something awakens a feeling as if I ought to remember—remember—what ? I do not know.—I am better now. Your voice, my dear, at such a moment is to me like the sound of David's harp to Saul. It chases away the shadows. Oh ! I am better already. I am well. If you want to ask any other

questions, do so. As for those transactions—they are perfectly correct in form and everything. I cannot for the life of me understand why Dering, who is a practical man'——

‘Never mind Dering, my dear Master—or those transactions. Think only of the world of the New Humanity. Leave the transactions and the papers to me. I hope that you will never find out why they were wanted, or how they were to be used.—Now let us start. We shall be in excellent time.’

The Hall of Science was half full of people—the usual gathering—those who came every Sunday evening and took the simple feast of fraternity. The table was spread with the white cloth, on which were laid out the toast and muffins, the ham and shrimps, and bread and butter and watercress; and on the appearance of the Chief, the tea was brought up, and they all sat down. Now, it had been observed by all that since the adhesion of this young lady the Leader’s discourses had been

much more confident, his manner had been clearer, his points more forcibly put. This was because, for the first time, he had had an opportunity of discussing his own doctrines with a mind able to follow him. Nothing so valuable to a teacher of new things as a sympathetic woman for listener and disciple. Witness the leading example of the Prophet Mohammed. Also, their leader had never before been so cheerful—so hopeful—so full of life and youth and spring. He was young again: he talked like a young man, though his hair was gray. This was because he loved a woman, for the first time in his life: he called it paternal affection: whatever kind of love it was, it worked in him the same miracle that love always works in man—young or old—it gave him back the fire of youth.

This evening he sat at the head of the table dispensing his simple hospitality with a geniality and a heartiness unknown before the arrival of this young lady. He talked, mean-

time, in the lofty vein, above the style and manner common to his hearers, but not above their comprehension; he spoke of a higher life attainable by man at his best, when the victory over nature should be complete, and every force should be subdued and made slave to man, and all diseases should be swept away, and the Perfect man should stand upon the earth at last, Lord and Master of all—*Adamus Redivivus*. When that time should come, there would be no Property, of course; everything was to be in common; but the new life would be full of love and joy; there would be long-continued youth, so that none should be made to rise from the feast unsatisfied; nay, it seemed to this Dreamer that everyone should continue at the feast as long as he pleased, till he was satiated and desired a change. Long-continued youth; all were to be young, and to keep young; the girls were to be beautiful and the men strong; he pronounced—he—the hermit—the anchorite—the celibate, who knew not love—a eulogy

on the beauty of women: and he mourned over those men who miss their share of love.

The hearts of those who heard were uplifted, for this man had the mesmeric faculty of compelling those who heard him to feel what he wanted them to feel. Most of them had been accustomed to regard their Leader as a man of benevolent manners but austere principles. Now he was tender and human, full of sympathy even with those weak vessels who fall in love, and for the sake of love are content to be all their lives slaves—yea, even slaves to Property.

After tea, the tables being cleared, the Chief pronounced his weekly address or sermon. It was generally a discourse on the principles, which all professed, of equality and the abolition of Property. To-night, he carried on the theme on which he had spoken at tea-time, and discoursed on the part which should be played by Love in the New Humanity. Never before had he spoken so convincingly.

Never had orator an audience more in sympathy with him.

Shortly after the beginning of the address, there arrived two gentlemen, young and well dressed, who sat down modestly just within the door and listened. The people turned and looked at them with interest. They were not quite the kind of young man peculiar to the street or to the quarter.

When the lecture was over and the audience crowded together to talk before they separated, Elsie slipped across to the new-comers and led them to the lecturer. 'Master,' she said, 'this is my brother Athelstan.'

Mr. Edmund Gray shook hands with him. 'Why, Elsie,' he said, 'your brother and I have met already in Gray's Inn.'

'And this is my friend George Austin, Partner of Mr. Dering.'

'Mr. Austin,' said Mr. Edmund Gray, 'I am glad to meet the man who is about to enter into the most sacred of all bonds with

one whom I venture to love, sir, as much as you yourself can do, though I love her as my daughter, and you love her as your bride. You will be the happiest of men. Take care, sir, that you deserve your happiness.'

'This day,' said Elsie, 'you have rendered us all such a service as can never be acknowledged, or repaid, or forgotten. Yet we hope and pray that somehow you will never understand how great it is.'

CHAPTER XXXIV

LE CONSEIL DE FAMILLE

‘CHECKLEY,’ said Mr. Dering on Monday morning, ‘here is a note from Miss Elsie Arundel. She makes an appointment with me at four o’clock this afternoon. Keep me free for that hour. Her brother Athelstan is coming with her.—What’s the matter, man?’

‘It’s coming, then. I knew it would come,’ Checkley groaned. ‘It’s all over at last.’

‘What is all over?’

‘Everything. But don’t you believe it. Tell ’em it’s a lie made up to screen themselves. They can’t prove it. Nobody can prove it. I’ll back you up. Only don’t

you believe it. Mind—it is a lie—a made-up lie.’

‘I don’t know what has been the matter with you for the last day or two, Checkley. What am I not to believe? What is a lie? Who is making up a lie which cannot be proved?’

‘Oh! I can’t say the word—I can’t. It’s all over at last—at last.’ He ran out of the room and slammed the door behind him.

‘My dear mother’—Hilda drove to Pembroke Square directly after breakfast—‘I have had a most curious letter from Elsie. What does it mean? She orders—she does not invite—she positively orders—Sir Samuel—actually orders Sir Samuel!—and myself to attend at Mr. Dering’s office at four. We are ordered to assist, she says, at the demolition of the structure we have so carefully erected.—What structure? What does she mean? Here is the letter.’

‘I too, dear, have had a letter from her. She says that at four o’clock this afternoon all the wrongful and injurious suspicions will be cleared away, and that if I value the affection of my son and herself—the affection of herself—I must be present.—Hilda, what does this mean? I am very much troubled about the letter. On Saturday, she came here and informed me that the wedding would be held on Wednesday just as if nothing had happened; and she foretold that we should all be present, and that Athelstan would give her away—Athelstan. It is a very disquieting letter, because, my dear, do you think we could all of us—could we possibly be wrong, have been wrong from the very beginning—in Athelstan’s case? Could Sir Samuel be wrong in George’s case?’

‘My dear mother, it is impossible. The case, unhappily, is too clear to admit of any doubt. Sir Samuel, with his long experience, could not be wrong.’

‘Then, Hilda, dear, what can Elsie mean?’

‘We have been talking about it all through breakfast. The only conclusion we can come to is, that there is going to be a smothering up of the whole business. Mr. Dering, who has been terribly put out with the case, must have consented to smother up the matter. We think that the papers have been returned with the money received on dividends and coupons; and that Mr. Dering has agreed to take no further proceedings. Now, if he would do that, Athelstan of course would come under a kind of Act of Indemnity; and as the notes were never used by him, but were returned to their owner, it becomes as easy to recognise his innocence as that of the other man.—Do you see?’

‘Yes. But that will not make them innocent.’

‘Certainly not. But it makes all the difference in the world. Oh! there are families everywhere who have had to smother up things in order to escape a scandal. Well, I

hope you will agree with us, and accept the invitation.'

'I suppose I must.—But how about removing all the suspicions?'

'Oh! that is only Elsie's enthusiastic way. She will go on, if she likes, believing that George had nothing to do with it. He will have every inducement to live honestly for the future. We can easily pretend to believe that Athelstan was always innocent, and we can persuade him—at least I hope we can persuade him—to go abroad. Sir Samuel kindly says that he will advance a hundred pounds in order to get rid of him. Then there will be no scandal, and everybody will be satisfied: As for our relations with Elsie and her husband, we can arrange them afterwards. Perhaps they will agree to live in a distant suburb—say Redhill, or Chislehurst, or Walthamstow—so that there may be a good excuse for never having them to the house. Because—smothering or no smothering—I can no longer have the same feelings towards Elsie

as before. Her obstinate infatuation for that man exasperates me only to think of it. Nor have I the least intention of being on intimate relations with a forger who has only just escaped being a convict. Sir Samuel entirely agrees with me.'

The mother sighed. 'I could have wished that we were mistaken. Perhaps, after all, there may be something that Elsie has found out, some unexpected'——

'Say a miracle at once, my dear mother. It is just as likely to happen.'

The first to arrive at the office in the afternoon was Elsie herself, carrying a handbag.

'You were going to bring your brother, Elsie,' said Mr. Dering. 'Where is he? And what is your important business with me? I suppose it is something about this wretched forgery, which really seems destined to finish me off. I have heard of nothing else—I think of nothing else—ever since it happened.'

‘First, has anything new been discovered?’

‘I hardly know,’ Mr. Dering replied wearily. ‘They seem to have found the man Edmund Gray; but Checkley has suddenly cooled. Formerly, he clamoured perpetually that we must lose no time in getting a warrant for his arrest; he now wants to put it off and put it off. He was going on very strangely this morning. My dear, I sometimes think that my old clerk is off his head.’

‘And you yourself—have you had any return of your forgetfulness?’

‘Worse—worse.—Every day, worse. I now know when to look for a return of these fits. Every morning I ask myself what I did the day before. Always there are the same hours of forgetfulness—the morning and the evening. Last night, where was I? Perhaps somebody will find out for me—for I cannot remember.’

‘Shall I find out for you, Mr. Dering? If

I were to tell you where you spent the evening yesterday, would you—would you ?’——

‘What? How can you find out?’

Elsie bent her head. The moment had almost arrived, and she was afraid. She had come with the intention of clearing her brother and her lover at the cost of letting her guardian know that he was insane. A dreadful price to pay for their honour. But it had to be paid. And it must be done in the sight of all, so that there should be no possible margin left for malignity or suspicion.

‘This business,’ she said, ‘concerns the honour of the two men who are dearer to me than all the world beside. Remember that—nothing short of that would make me do what I have been doing—what I am now doing. Their honour—oh! their honour. Think what it means to them. Self-respect, dignity, everything: the happiness of their homes: the pride of their children. Compared with one man’s honour, what matters another man’s

humiliation? What matters the loss of that man's self-respect? What matters his loss of dignity? Their honour, Mr. Dering, think of that—their honour!’

He bowed his head gravely, wondering what was to follow.

‘A man's honour, as you say, Elsie, is the greatest thing in the world to him. Compared with that, another man's self-respect need not, I should say, as a general principle, be considered at all. Self-respect may be regained unless honour is lost.’

‘Remember that, then, Mr. Dering, when you hear what I have to say. Promise me to remember that. Oh! if there were a thousand reasons, formerly, why I would not pain you by a single word, there are ten thousand now—although you understand them not.’

‘Why, Elsie, you are troubling your little head about trifles. You will not offend me whatever you say.’

‘It is so important a thing,’ she went on, ‘that I have asked my mother and sister and

Sir Samuel to meet us here at four o'clock, in order that they, too, may hear as well as you. Athelstan is with George. They have one or two persons to introduce to you.'

'All this seems to promise a meeting of some interest, and so far as one may judge from the preamble, of more than common importance. Well, Elsie, I am quite in your hands. If you and your brother between you will kindly produce the forger and give me back my property, I shall be truly grateful.'

'You shall see, Mr. Dering. But as for the gratitude—— Oh! here is Sir Samuel.'

The City knight appeared, large and important. He shook hands with Elsie and his brother, and took up his position on the hearth-rug, behind his brother's chair. 'Well, Elsie,' he said, 'we are to hear something very important indeed, if one may judge by the tone of your letter, which was imperative.'

'Very important indeed, Sir Samuel.'

The next to arrive were Mrs. Arundel and Hilda. They wore thick veils, and Hilda was

dressed in a kind of half-mourning. They took chairs at the open window, between the historic safe and the equally historic small table. Lastly, George and Athelstan walked in. They received no greetings.

Mr. Dering rose. 'Athelstan,' he said, 'it is eight years since you left us.' He held out his hand.

'Presently, Mr. Dering,' said Athelstan. He looked round the room. His mother trembled, dropped her head, and put her handkerchief to her eyes, but said nothing. His sister looked out of window. Sir Samuel took no notice of him at all. Athelstan took a chair—the clients' chair—and placed it so as to have his mother and sister at the side. He was not therefore compelled to look at them across the table. He sat down, and remained in silence and motionless.

The Court was now complete. Mr. Dering sat in his chair before his table, expectant, judicial. Sir Samuel stood behind him. Mrs. Arundel and Hilda, the two ladies, sat at the

open window. Elsie stood opposite to Mr. Dering, on the other side of the table, her handbag before her. She looked like Counsel about to open the case for plaintiff. Athelstan—or plaintiff—naturally occupied the clients' chair on Mr. Dering's left; and George, as naturally—the other plaintiff—stood behind him.

‘Now, Elsie, if you please,’ Mr. Dering began.

‘I shall want your clerk, Checkley, to be present, if you please.’

Mr. Dering touched his bell. The clerk appeared. He stood before them like a criminal, pale and trembling. He looked at his master appealingly. His hands hung beside him. Yet not a word of accusation had been brought against him.

‘Lord! Man alive!’ cried Sir Samuel, ‘what on earth has come over you?’

Checkley shook his head sadly, but made no reply.

‘I want to ask you a question or two,

Checkley,' said Elsie quietly. 'You have told Mr. Dering—you have told Sir Samuel—that you saw my brother furtively put a parcel—presumably the stolen notes—into the safe at the very moment when you were charging him with forgery. Now, consider. That was a very serious thing to say. It was a direct statement of fact. Before, the charge rested on suspicion alone; but this is fact. Consider carefully. You may have been mistaken. Any of us may make a mistake.'

'It was true—Gospel truth—I see him place a parcel—edging along sideways—in the safe. The parcel we found afterwards in the safe containing all the notes.' The words were confident; but the manner was halting.

'Very well. Next, you told Sir Samuel that my brother had been living in some low suburb of London with profligate companions, and that he had been even going about in rags and tatters.'

'Yes, I did. I told Sir Samuel what I

heard. Mr. Carstone told me. You'd better ask him. I only told what I heard.'

George went out, and returned, bringing with him Mr. Freddy Carstone. He looked round the room and stared with surprise at Mr. Dering, but said nothing. He had been warned to say nothing, except in answer to questions.

'Now, Mr. Carstone,' Elsie asked him, 'how long is it since you met my brother after his return to England?'

'About three weeks ago I met him. It was in Holborn. I invited him into the *Salutation Tavern*.'

'Did you tell Mr. Checkley here anything about his way of living?'

'I remember saying, foolishly, that he looked too respectable to have come from America; and I said in joke that I believed he had been in Camberwell all the time.'

'Nothing about profligacy?'

'Nothing at all.'

‘Nothing about rags and tatters?’

‘Certainly not. In fact, I knew nothing at all about Athelstan’s life during the eight years that he has been away.’

‘Have you anything to say, Checkley? You still stick to the parcel story, do you? Very well, and to the Camberwell and profligacy story?’

Checkley made no answer.

‘Now, then. There is another question. You made a great point about certain imitations of Mr. Dering’s writing found in a drawer of Athelstan’s table?’

‘Well, they were there, in your brother’s hand.’

‘George, you have something to say on this point.’

‘Only this. I was not long articulated at that time. The table was taken from the room in which I sat, and placed here for some special work. Now, the imitations of Mr. Dering’s handwriting were made by myself and another clerk in joke. I remember them

perfectly. They were written at the back of a letter addressed to me.'

Mr. Dering went to the safe and produced the bundle containing all the papers in the case. He unrolled the bundle and placed the contents on the table.

Everybody was now serious. Lady Dering looked out of the window no longer. Mrs. Arundel had drawn her chair to the table.

Elsie picked out the paper containing the imitations. 'Tell me,' she said, 'if you remember—mind—everybody—this bundle of papers has never been shown to George—tell me the name of your correspondent?'

'It was Leonard Henryson.'

She gave the paper to Mr. Dering. 'You see,' she said.

The lawyer gave it to his brother, who passed it on to his wife, who gave it to her mother. Mrs. Arundel laid it on the table and raised her veil.

'The next point,' said Elsie, 'is about

Athelstan's whereabouts during the last eight years. One letter was received by you, Mr. Dering, four years ago. You have already shown it to me. Will you let me read this letter aloud for all to hear?' It was in the bundle with the stopped notes. He bowed assent—and she read it.

'Twelve thousand pounds!' cried Sir Samuel—'twelve thousand pounds! All he had! Good Heavens!'

'All he had in the world,' said Elsie. 'And all for a child who refused to believe that her brother could be a villain! All he had in the world!' Her eyes filled with tears—but she dashed them aside and went on.

'He was in the States four years ago. That, I suppose, will no longer be denied. The next question is—when did he return to this country?'

George left the room again, and returned with a young gentleman.

'This gentleman,' Elsie continued, 'comes

from Messrs. Chenery & Sons, bankers, of New York and London. He has brought a letter with him. Will you kindly let me see it, sir?—It is,' she explained, 'a letter of credit brought over by my brother from California. You see the date—June 20th of this year.'

Mr. Dering read it, and gave it to his brother, who gave it to his wife, as before.

'It says that Mr. Athelstan Arundel, one of the staff of a certain Californian paper, will leave New York on June the 21st by the *Shannon* and that he is authorised to draw on Messrs. Chenery & Sons for so much.—Thank you.' The young gentleman retired.

'Now, Mr. Dering, are you satisfied that Athelstan was in America four years ago—that he left America two months ago, and that he was then on the staff of a Californian paper?'

'There seems no reason to doubt these facts.—But'—he put his forefinger on the cheque payable to the order of Edmund Gray

—‘are we any nearer to the forger of this cheque?’

‘I am coming to that presently. I am going to show you all, so that there shall be no doubt whatever, who is the forger—the one hand—in the business. Wait a little.’

Strangely enough, every eye fell upon Checkley, who now trembled and shook with every sign of terror.

‘Sit down, Checkley,’ said his master.—‘Elsie, do we want this gentleman any longer? His name I have not the pleasure of knowing.’

‘Oh! come,’ said Mr. Carstone, who was nearest. ‘You know my name, surely.’

George warned him with a look, and he subsided into silence.

‘I think I shall want you, Mr. Carstone,’ Elsie replied, ‘if you will kindly take a chair and wait.—Now, Sir Samuel, I think I am right in saying that your belief in the guilt of George rested entirely on the supposed complicity of Athelstan. That gone, what be-

comes of your charge? Also, there is no doubt, I believe, that one hand, and one hand alone, has committed the whole long list of letters and forgeries. If, therefore, Athelstan could not execute the second business, how could he do the first? But I have more than arguments for you.'

Sir Samuel coughed. Mrs. Arundel sighed.

'As regards the charge against George, apart from his supposed intimacy with an imaginary criminal, the only suspicious thing is that he may have had access to the open safe. Well, Checkley also may have had access. —Don't be afraid, Checkley—we are not going to charge you with the thing at all. You are not the forger. In fact, there was a third person who had access to the safe.'

She opened her handbag and took out a packet of papers.

Then she sat down, with these in her hand, and leaning over the table, she looked straight and full into Mr. Dering's eyes, and began to talk slowly in a low and murmuring voice.

And now, indeed, everybody understood that something very serious indeed was going to be said and done. At the last moment a way had occurred to Elsie. She would let them all see for themselves what had happened, and she would spare her guardian the bitter shame and pain of being exposed in the presence of all this company.

‘Mr. Dering,’ she began, ‘you have strangely forgotten that you know Mr. Edmund Gray. How could you come to forget that? Why, it is ten years at least since you made his acquaintance. He knows you very well. He does not pretend to have forgotten you. You are his solicitor. You have the management of his property—his large private fortune—in your hands. You are his most intimate friend. It is not well to forget old friends, is it? You must not say that you forget Edmund Gray.’

Mr. Dering changed colour. His eyes expressed bewilderment. He made no reply.

‘ You know that Edmund Gray leaves this room every evening on his way to Gray’s Inn : you remember that. And that he comes here every morning, but not till eleven or twelve—two hours after the time that you yourself used to come. His head is always so full of his thoughts and his teaching, that he forgets the time between twelve and four, just as you forget the evening and the morning. You are both so much absorbed that you cannot remember each other.’

Mr. Dering sat upright, the tips of his fingers touching. He listened at first gravely—though anxiously. Presently a remarkable change passed over his face ; he became full of anxiety. He listened as if he was trying to remember ; as if he was trying to understand.

‘ Edmund Gray,’ he said, speaking slowly. ‘ Yes, I remember my client Edmund Gray. I have a letter to write for him. What is it ? Excuse me a moment ; I must write that note for him.’ He took pen and paper and hastily

wrote a note, which Elsie took from him, read, and gave to Sir Samuel.

‘You want to tell the banker that Mr. Edmund Gray has returned you the transfers. —Yes—Thank you. I thought you could not forget that client, of all others.’

He leaned back smiling—his expression no longer anxious, but pleased and happy. The change transformed him. He was not Mr. Dering, but another.

‘Go on, child.’

‘The rooms of Gray’s Inn are quiet all day long. It is a peaceful place for study, is it not? You sit there, your books before you, the world forgotten.’

‘Quite forgotten,’ said Mr. Dering.

‘No—no,’ cried Checkley, springing to his feet. ‘I won’t have it done. I’——

‘Sit down.’ George pushed him back into his chair. ‘Another word, and you leave the room.’

‘It is a peaceful day,’ Elsie continued, ‘that you pass—for the most part alone—you

with your books. Sometimes you come here to call upon your old friend and solicitor, Mr. Dering.'

'Sometimes,' he replied. 'We are very old friends. Though his views are narrow.—Where is he?' He looked about the room. 'You are all waiting to see him? He will be here directly. He is always here about this time.'

'Yes, directly. You remember what I said to you on Sunday concerning certain transactions? I told you how important it was to have the exact truth about them.'

'Certainly. I remember. I wrote an account of them for you.'

'You did. Are these papers what you wrote?'

He looked at them for a moment. 'These are my papers,' he said. 'They are what I wrote at your request. They contain a perfectly true account of what happened.'

'Now, before I go on, you will not mind—these people here do not know Mr. Edmund

Gray—you will not mind my asking a few persons to testify that you are really Mr. Edmund Gray?’

‘My dear child, ask all the world if you wish; though I do not understand why my identity should be doubted.’

‘Not quite all the world.—Mr. Carstone, will you tell us the name of this gentleman?’

‘He is Mr. Edmund Gray, my neighbour at No. 22 South Square, Gray’s Inn.’

Mr. Edmund Gray inclined his head and smiled.

George went outside and returned, followed by a small company, who, in answer to Elsie, stepped forward one after the other and made answer.

Said one: ‘I am the landlord of the rooms at 22 South Square tenanted by Mr. Edmund Gray. He has held the rooms for ten years. This gentleman is Mr. Edmund Gray, my tenant.’

Said another: ‘I am a barrister, and the tenant of the rooms above those held by Mr.

Edmund Gray. I have known him—more or less—for ten years. This gentleman is Mr. Edmund Gray.’

Said a third: ‘I am a commissionnaire. I remember this gentleman very well, though it is eight years since he employed me, and only for one job then. I went from an hotel in Arundel Street, Strand, to a bank with a cheque which I was to cash for him in ten-pound notes. He gave me half a sovereign.’

‘Quite so,’ said Mr. Edmund Gray. ‘I remember you, too. It was a cheque for seven hundred and twenty pounds, the particulars of which you have in my statement, Elsie. I well remember this one-armed commissionnaire.’

And a fourth: ‘I am the laundress who does for Mr. Edmund Gray. I have done for him for ten years. This gentleman is Mr. Edmund Gray.’

And a fifth: ‘I am a news-agent, and I have a shop at the entrance of Gray’s Inn. This gentleman is Mr. Edmund Gray, of 22

South Square. I have known him in the Inn for ten years.'

To each in turn Mr. Dering nodded with a kindly smile.

'Athelstan,' said Elsie, 'will you tell us when and where you have met Mr. Edmund Gray?'

'I met him last week in Carstone's rooms on the same landing. He sat with us for an hour or more.'

'It is quite true,' said Mr. Dering. 'I have had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Arundel on that occasion.'

'I also saw him,' Athelstan continued, 'at a small Lecture Hall at Kentish Town on Sunday evening—yesterday.'

'To complete the evidence,' said Elsie, 'I have myself spent many hours almost daily with Mr. Edmund Gray during the last fortnight or so.—Is not that true, dear Master?'

'Quite true, my Scholar.'

'Brother—brother'—Sir Samuel touched

his arm—‘I implore you—rouse yourself. Shake off this fancy.’

‘Let him alone, Sir Samuel,’ said George—‘let him alone. We have not done with him yet.’

‘Yes,’ cried Mrs. Arundel, who had now left her seat and was leaning over the table, following what was said with breathless interest—‘let us finish out this comedy or tragedy—as the case may be. Let no one interrupt.’

‘I have also met you, sir’—Mr. Dering addressed Checkley, who only groaned and shook. ‘It was outside a tavern. You took me in and offered me a drink.’

Checkley shook his head, either in sadness or in denial—but replied not, and at the thought of offering Mr. Dering a drink, everybody laughed, which was a relief.

‘Dear Master,’ Elsie went on in her soft voice, ‘I am so glad that you remember all these things. It makes one’s task so much easier. Why, your memory is as strong as

ever, in spite of all your work.—Now, I am going to read the two statements you wrote down yesterday afternoon. Then you may recall anything else you might like to add. Remember, that as regards this first affair, the cheque for seven hundred and twenty pounds, my brother was charged, on suspicion only, with having forged it. Now listen.’ She read the brief statement which you have already seen concerning the business of the first cheque. ‘That is your history of the affair.’

‘Quite so. Dering drew the cheque at my request. I cashed it. I found that I had no need of the notes, and I returned them. That is very simple.’

‘It is all so simple that nobody ever guessed it before.—Now we come to the transfers made in the spring of the present year. You wrote a second statement regarding them. I will read that as well. Please listen very carefully.’

She read the other statement, which you

have also seen already. She read it very slowly, so that there should be no mistake possible. During the reading of these documents Sir Samuel's face expressed every possible shade of surprise. Mrs. Arundel, leaning over the table, followed every line. Hilda wept—her head gracefully inclined over her pocket-handkerchief, as if it was an urn.

‘This is your account of the business?’

‘Certainly. There is nothing more to be added. It is a plain statement of the facts. I do not understand how they could be in any way doubted or misrepresented.’

‘Would you, Sir Samuel, like to ask Mr. Edmund Gray any question?’

‘I don't understand. He says that Mr Dering wrote a letter for him.’

Elsie showed him the letter they had seen Mr. Dering write, which he was passing from one to the other.

‘Where are the transfers?’ Sir Samuel went on. ‘He says they were placed by himself in the safe.’

Mr. Edmund Gray rose and walked to the safe. He laid his hands upon a packet and took it out. 'These are the papers,' he said.

Sir Samuel opened the roll and looked them over. 'They seem all right,' he said. 'This is very wonderful.'

'Wonderful—and sad—most lamentable,' whispered Lady Dering.

'Wonderful indeed !' Mrs. Arundel echoed. 'Most wonderful ! most unexpected !'

'A moment more, and I have done.' Elsie again took up the tale. 'Here is a cheque to the order of Mr. Dering signed by Mr. Edmund Gray for the whole of the money lying in his name at the Bank.—You agree, Master, that it is best for the future that all your affairs should be in the hands of your solicitor ?'

'I quite agree.'

'Here is a letter to the manager of the Bank, requesting him to pay over Edmund Gray's dividends to the account of Mr. Dering.—And now I think I have proved my case.

Here in the safe were the ten-pound notes received by Mr. Edmund Gray, and placed there by him. Here were the transfers and certificates placed there by him : you have heard half-a-dozen people testify to the fact that you have Edmund Gray before you. His statement of the business has been read to you. It shows, what no other theory of the case could show, how the thing was really done. Lastly, it shows the absolute and complete innocence of my brother and of George.—Have you anything more to say, Sir Samuel ?’

‘Nothing—except that I was misled by a statement concerning a profligate life among low companions, without which no suspicion could have fallen upon either of you gentlemen. It was’—he pointed to the unhappy Checkley—‘a vile and malignant falsehood. Do you hear, sir ? Vile and malignant. It only remains for us all to make such reparation as we may—nothing would suffice, I know, but such reparation as we can—by the expression of the shame and regret that we all feel.’

‘Athelstan,’ said his mother, ‘what can I say? Oh! what can I say?’

Athelstan rose—during the long business he had sat motionless in the clients’ chair, his head in his hand. Now he rose and stepped over to his mother. ‘Hush!’ he said. ‘Not a word. It is all forgotten—all forgiven.’

But Hilda sank upon her knees and caught his hands.

‘George,’ said Sir Samuel, ‘forgive me. The case looked black against you at one time. It did indeed. Forgive me.’ He held out his hand.

Then there was great hand-shaking, embracing, and many tears. As for Checkley, he crept out and vanished in the retreat of his own room. ‘It is all over,’ he murmured—‘all over. I’ve lost four hundred pounds a year. That’s gone. All over—all over!’

Mr. Edmund Gray looked on this happy scene of family reconciliation with benevolence and smiles.

Family reconciliations must not be pro-

longed ; you cannot sit over a family reconciliation as over a bottle of port. It must be quickly despatched. Sir Samuel whispered to Hilda that they had better go.

‘Come,’ said Lady Dering. ‘We will all meet again this evening at Pembridge Square—and to-morrow evening—and on Wednesday afternoon.—Elsie, you are a witch and a sorceress and a wise woman. You said that Athelstan should give you away, and he will.—Brother, come with us. Leave Elsie to George.—Oh ! how handsome you are looking, my poor ill-used brother. Try to forgive us if you can.’

She turned to Mr. Edmund Gray. ‘Sir,’ she said, ‘we ought to be very grateful to you—indeed, we are—for enabling us to clear away the odious cloud of suspicion which had rolled over our heads. It was very good of you to draw out those statements for my sister. But I do think that if Mr. Dering had told his old friends about you—about Mr. Edmund Gray—we should have been spared

a great deal of trouble and unnecessary shame.
—Good-day, sir.'

Sir Samuel lingered a moment. He looked as if he would appeal to Mr. Edmund Gray as to a brother. 'Don't speak to him,' Elsie whispered. 'Let him alone. He will become himself again presently. Let him alone.'

So he went out, and the door was shut, and Edmund Gray was left alone with George and the Scholar.

'My Master'—Elsie sat down beside him—
'I fear you have been interrupted. But indeed it was necessary. Don't ask why. Things get into a muddle sometimes, don't they? You have gathered something of the trouble, too. Now that is all over—past and gone.'

'I am glad for your sake, child.'

'Master—dear Master—I have a confession to make. When I found out who you were—I mean what manner of man you were—my only thought at first was to coax you and wheedle you and flatter you till you gave me

exactly the information that I wanted. I confess it. That was my only purpose. Nay—more—for the sake of my lover and my brother I would do it again. Well—I found that the only way to win your confidence was to pretend to be your Scholar and to believe all you taught. So I pretended. So I won your confidence. So I obtained all I wanted. So I have made it impossible for even the most malignant creature in the world to pretend that these two men had anything to do with what they called a forgery. But—believe me, dear Master—while I pretended, I was punished, because my pretence is turned to certainty.’

‘Child, I knew it. You could not pretend—no woman could pretend so as to deceive me on a point so simple.’

‘Dear Master, you do not know the possibilities of feminine craft. But I pretend no more. Oh! I care not how you make your attempt, whether you destroy Property or not. Mr. Dering says that Property is Civilisation—

but I don't care. To me it is enough to dream—to know—that there is an Earthly Paradise possible, if only men will think so and will keep it before their eyes, though it be as far off as the blue hills. It is beautiful only to think of it ; the soul is lifted up only to think that there is such a place. Keep the eyes of your people on this glorious place, dear Master : make it impossible for them to forget it or to let it go out of their sight. Then, half-unconsciously, they will be running, dragging each other, forcing each other—exhorting each other to hurry along the dusty road which leads to that Earthly Paradise with its Four-square City of the Jasper wall. Preach about it, Master. Write about it. Make all men talk about it and think about it.'

She threw her arms round his neck and kissed him.

'Master, we shall be away for a month or two. Then we shall come back, and I shall sit at your feet again. You shall come and

stay with us. We will give you love, and you shall give us hope. I have made my confession. Forgive me.'

They left him sitting alone. Presently he arose, put all the papers back in the safe, and walked slowly away—to Gray's Inn.

Next morning when he opened his letters he found one marked 'Private.' It was from Sir Samuel.

'DEAR EDWARD,' it said—'We are all very glad to tell you that the business of the shares and certificates is now completely cleared up. Checkley is not in any way concerned in it—nor is George Austin. And I am happy to say there is a complete solution of the former mystery which entirely clears Hilda's brother. Under these circumstances, we are agreed that it is best for you not to trouble yourself about any further investigations. You will find in the safe the transfers, a cheque to yourself of all the money received by Edmund Gray, and an order in the Bank concerning the dividends.

You have been the victim of a very remarkable hallucination. I need not explain further. Mr. Edmund Gray, however, is undoubtedly insane. I hear, and have myself observed, that you have been greatly disturbed and distressed by these mysterious events. Now that they are settled finally—I may say that only a happy chance set us on the right track—we all hope that you will be satisfied with our assurance, and that you will not trouble yourself any more in the matter.—Your affectionate brother,

‘SAMUEL DERING.’

Mr. Dering, after reading this letter, got up and looked in the safe, where he found the papers referred to. He rang the bell. ‘Checkley, who has been at my safe?’

‘Nobody but you.’

‘Don’t tell lies. Who put those papers in the safe?’

‘They must have been put there yesterday—you were in the room.’

‘Yesterday—what happened yesterday?’
Checkley was silent.

‘Who was here yesterday?—Go on, Checkley. Don’t be afraid.’

‘Sir Samuel was here—and Lady Dering—and Mrs. Arundel—and Miss Elsie—and your Partner—and Mr. Athelstan. Two or three more came in and went away.’

‘That will do. You need tell me no more. I don’t want to know the particulars.—Checkley, my day’s work is done. I have thought so for some time past. Now I am certain, I shall retire.’

‘No—no,’ cried Checkley, the tears running down his face. ‘Not to retire—after all these years—not to retire.’

‘I know now the meaning of my fits of forgetfulness. I have feared and suspected it for a long time. While I am lost to myself, I am going about the world, doing I know not what. And I will not ask. I may be this Edmund Gray who preaches Socialism and gives me his precious tracts. I may be some

one else. I say, Checkley, that I know now what has happened to me. Deny it if you can—if you can, I say.'

Checkley did not offer any denial. He hung his head.—'This is the meaning of Elsie's strange hints and queer protestations. Half my time I am a madman—a madman.—Checkley, ask Mr. Austin to come to me at once. My day is done.' He closed his open blotting-pad and placed the unopened letters beside it. Then he rose and pushed back his chair—the chair in which he had sat for fifty years and more. 'My day is done—my day is done.'

CHAPTER XXXV

THE LAST

MR. DERING left his office, went back to Gray's Inn, and sat down again before the Ivory Gate. Those who have once sat for an hour or two in this place return to it again and again and never leave it. It is, to begin with, the most beautiful gate ever erected. The brain and wit and fancy of man could never conceive such a gate, could never execute such a conception. It is all of pure ivory, carved with flowers such as never grew; curving and flowing lines leading nowhere; figures of maidens lovely beyond all dreams; philosophers whose wisdom reaches unto the Heavens; statesmen who discern the gathering forces and control the destinies of a nation; inventors who conquer nature;

physicians who prolong life ; ecclesiastics who convert the Carthusian cell into a bower of delight ; poets who here find their fantasies divine ; men and women in work-a-day dress who wear the faces of the heavenly host.

All the dreamers lie here, not asleep, but dreaming. Their eyes are open, but they do not see each other ; they see these dreams. Those of the young who are also generous come here and dream until they grow older and are chained to their work and can dream no more. Men of all conditions come here—even the little shop-boy—even the maiden who cleans the knives and polishes the boots—all are here. The young Prince is here : the little charity boy is here : the lad whose loftiest ambition is that he may one day stand in the pulpit of the little Baptist village chapel is here : here is the undergraduate who was Captain of Eton and will be Senior Classic and Member of Parliament and Minister—even Prime Minister—and will belong to History. The poet is here, and the painter,

and sometimes hither comes the novelist, and, but more rarely, the dramatist. Hither comes the musician to lift up his soul with thoughts that only music can give; and the singer, so that he sings more than is apparent from the words; and the actor, so that he puts things into the play never dreamed by him who wrote it. Great is the power, great the gifts, of this noble Gate of Ivory.

Sitting before that gate, such a dreamer as Edmund Gray receives strange visions. He sees clearly and near at hand the things which might be, yet are not, and never can be until man lays down his garb of selfishness and puts on the white robes of Charity. To that dreamer the Kingdom of Heaven, which seems to some so far off and to others impossible, so that they deride the name of it, is actually close at hand—with us—easy to enter if we only choose. He exhorts his fellows to enter with him. And they would follow, but they cannot because they are held back by custom and necessity.

They must obey the laws of the multitude, and so they stay where they are. And when the dreamer passes away, his memory is quickly lost, and the brightness quickly leaves those dimly-lighted lives. Yet other dreamers come—every day there arises an Edmund Gray.

Now when Edmund Gray takes the place of Edward Dering, in which guise does the soul, in the end, leave the earth? Are the dreams of Edmund Gray perhaps the logical development of the doctrines held by Edward Dering? Is the present stage of Individual Property—where every man works for himself and his household—one through which the world must pass before it can reach the higher level of working each for all? First men and women hunt, separate: they live apart in hollow trees and caves. Then they live together, and the man hunts for his wife and children. Next, they live in communities, which grow into towns and tribes and nations. Then men rely upon the protection of the

law, and work for themselves again. That is our present stage: it has lasted long—very long. Perhaps it will break up some day: perhaps sooner than we think. Who knows? All things are possible—even the crash and wreck of a civilisation which has taken thousands of years to build up. And upon it may come—one knows not—that other stage which now belongs to the dreamer before the Ivory Gate.

The wedding was held then, as Elsie said it should be, shorn of none of its splendours, and relieved of the cloud which had hung over them so long and threatened them so gloomily. Athelstan the Exile—Athelstan the Ne'er-do-well—Athelstan the Profligate—Athelstan the Resident of Camberwell—Athelstan the Smirched and Soiled—stood beside the altar, tall and gallant, and gave away the bride for all the world to see—nobody in the least ashamed of him. There was not any breath of scandal left. Here he was, returned

from his travels, a tall and proper man, dressed in broadcloth, perhaps with money in purse, prosperous and successful in the sight of all. His mother gazed upon him when she should have been looking at the bride or into her Prayer Book. Her eyes were red, but then a mother is allowed a tear or two when her daughter leaves the nest. And as to those who had whispered words about family jars, quarrels and estrangements, or had spoken against the fair fame of the groom, they were now as mute as mice.

All the richer members of the House of Arundel—the City Arundels—were present. One of them—chief partner in a leading firm of accountants—afterwards computed, for the greater increase of the family glory, how many hundreds of thousands of pounds were gathered together at one moment beneath that sacred roof. He counted the members, and made that little addition, during the performance of the ceremony. Those of the Austins who were not disgracefully poor—

there are some branches of the family, I believe, pretty low down—were also present. And the company went to Pembroke Square after the service, gazed admiringly at the wedding presents, and drank the health of the bride and bridegroom, and gathered with cousinly curiosity round the returned Prodigal. But they knew nothing—mind you—of his connection with Camberwell. And nothing about his supposed complicity in the Edmund Gray business. There had been, happily, no scandal.

Among the company in the church was Mr. Dering. He stood tall and erect, his coat buttoned, his face keen and hard, the family lawyer stamped by nature and long custom.

Presently, when the service was about half way through, a change came over him. His face relaxed: the lines curved just a little laterally, the austerity vanished, his eyes brightened. He took off his gloves furtively and opened his coat. He was Edmund Gray. In that capacity he afterwards drank to the

bride and wished her happiness. And he walked all the way from Pembridge Square to South Square, Gray's Inn.

I see in the future an old man growing feeble : he leans upon the arm of a girl whom he calls his Scholar, his disciple, and his child. His face is serene : he is perfectly happy : the Advent of that Kingdom whose glories he preaches is very nigh at hand. He lives in the house of his disciple : he has forgotten the very existence of his lawyer : he goes no more to Lincoln's Inn : always he is lying, night and day, before that miracle of carven work in Ivory. There he watches—it is his Vision—the long procession of those who work and sing at their work and are happy, work they ever so hard, because they work each for all and all for each. And there is no more sorrow or crying and no more pain. What hath the Gate of Horn—through which is allowed nothing but what is true—bitterly true—absolutely true

—nakedly, coldly, shiveringly true—to show in comparison with this? A crowd trampling upon each other: men who enslave and rob each other: men and women and children lying in misery—men and women and children starving.—Let us fly, my brothers—let us swiftly fly—let us hasten—to the Gate of Ivory.

THE END

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